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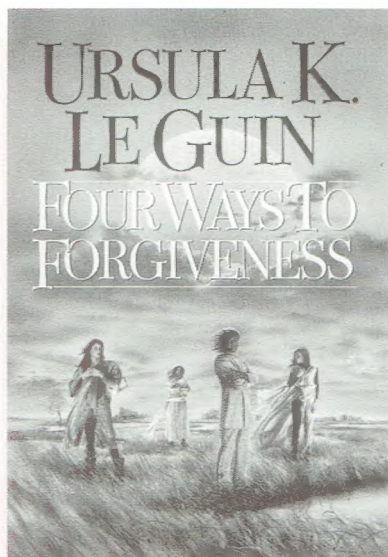
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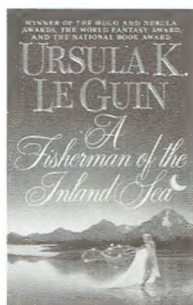
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ON this Issue

Jena Snyder, Production Editor

*"Science-fiction magazine success
no fantasy"*

Such is the title of a 5-column spread by Henry Mietkiewicz on the *ON SPEC* anthology [*ON SPEC: The First Five Years*] in *The Toronto Star* (August 19, 1995). Mietkiewicz calls it "one of the year's strongest collections of fantasy and science fiction." He singles out the following stories: "Just Like Old Times," by Robert J. Sawyer; "Frosty," by Jason Kapalka; "Why I Hunt Flying Saucers," by Hugh A. D. Spencer; "Three Moral Tales," by Dirk L. Schaeffer; and "Water," by Keith Scott. The piece also contains an interview with Cath Jackel. Thanks to Jean-Louis Trudel for forwarding this good news!

•

Apologies to DERRYL MURPHY, who should have been credited as Guest Editor for our Summer issue. We were too busy doing the headless chicken dance over the anthology to keep our dates straight!

•

ABOUT OUR COVER ARTIST:
LYNNE TAYLOR FAHNESTALK has been illustrating and designing professionally for over 15 years. She recently completed 3 years as Art Director for *ON SPEC* and has twice won the Aurora Award for artistic achievement. Her artwork will be included on a soon-to-be-released CD-ROM and she is busy selling silly penguin art as fast as she can yank it off the old drawing board. •

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TIM/HAMMELL ©1992

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ON the Wall: *TIM HAMMELL*

Winner of the 1994 Aurora Award for Artistic Achievement

GALLERY FEATURE

TIM HAMMELL of Loose Cannon Studios has been doing SF art for just ever, and this year finally won the coveted Aurora for artistic achievement.

Born in Calgary in 19XX, he returned there in 1992 and has been making his living, he realized recently, solely as an artist. With real art, not boring graphic design or dorky little airbrush jobs taking Uncle Mel out of wedding photos 'cause he had too many drinks, embarrassed the bride and the family and they don't want to see him any more. Much of Tim's income is derived from Crossover collaborations with several of the top professional photographers in Calgary.

In addition to the Aurora (for which he would like to thank all the people he helped get one by art directing their work in *ON SPEC* for finally getting out of the damn way), he was awarded Airbrush and Print Enhancement Best of Class trophies by the Alberta Professional Photographers Association.

Somewhat of a loose cannon in the photographic field (hence the studio name), he routinely works on photograph prints that have a value of upwards of \$1000 before he touches them. As his studio name indicates, Tim will paint anything. He's done everything from Cath Jackel (her real self) to motorcycle helmets to museum models.

Among his recent accomplishments is the largest commission of his career, the ceiling and wall murals of the Alberta Ballroom of the Palliser Hotel. He designed the "horror Easter eggs" for the film *Black Easter* being shot in New York state, and has turned his hand to writing: *Femmes Fatales* magazine published and paid him for his interview with actress June Wilkinson last summer; an article on Crossovers in the national magazine of the Professional Photographers of Canada; and the premiere issue of *Visions* magazine has his article on the digital SF series *REBOOT* (which he says if you haven't watched, you should).

Currently, he is beginning work on an \$18,000 Crossover piece for the new Harley-Davidson of Southern Alberta dealership.

Rather than reprinting a collection of past "created images" for this Aurora gallery, Tim decided, not easily, to submit sketches based on some of his darker dreams. This is real inner mind stuff, personal, mysterious, and somewhat unnerving to have printed for public consumption. He hasn't analyzed the images to see what they might mean, and presents them as they occurred to him (given the limitations of the sketch form). •







ONE SEQUENCE FROM A LONGER DREAM - I HAD TO
PRINT MY NAME ON EVERY PEBBLE ON THE BEACH
BEFORE I COULD SEE...





THIRD TIME LUCKY

Tanya Huff
illustrated by James Beveridge

The lizard had no idea it was being observed as it lay on top of the low coral wall, its mouth slightly open, its eyes unfocused golden jewels. Its only concern was with the warmth of the spring sun—not that the spring sun was much different from the winter sun.

“The real difference,” Magdelene explained every spring to a variety of sweating guests, “is that it goes from being hot to being damned hot.”

“How can you stand it?” one visitor had panted, languidly fanning himself with a palm leaf.

Magdelene’s grey eyes had crinkled at the corners. “I like it hot.” And she’d licked her lips.

The visitor, a handsome young nobleman who’d been sent south by his father until a small social infraction blew over, spent the rest of his life wondering if he’d misunderstood.

The lizard liked it hot as well.

Silk, Magdelene’s cat, did not. She was expecting her first litter of kittens and between the extra weight and the heat she was miserable. She did, however, like lizards.

The lizard never knew what hit him. One moment he was peacefully enjoying the sun, the next he was dangling upside down between uncomfortably sharp teeth being carried into the garden where he was suddenly and painfully dropped. He was stunned for a moment, then scuttled as fast as he could for the safety that beckoned from under a broken piece of tile.

He didn’t make it.

Twice more he was lifted, carried, and dropped. Finally he turned, raised his head, and hissed at his tormentor.

Which was quite enough for Silk. She lunged with dainty precision, bit the lizard’s head off, then made short work of the rest of it.

“Are you sure you should be eating lizards in your condition?” Magdelene asked.

The crunching of tiny bones had distracted her attention from her book.

Silk merely licked her lips disdainfully and stalked away, her distended belly swaying from side to side.

Magdelene laughed and returned to the story. It was a boring tale of two men adventuring in the land of the Djinn, but the friend who had brought it to her had gone to a great deal of trouble and books were rare—even with that printing device they had come up with in the east—so she read it.

"Mistress, will you be eating in the garden today?"

"Please, Kali. It'll be happening soon; I want to enjoy the peace while I can."

"Happening again, Mistress?"

"Some people never learn, Kali."

"One can hope, Mistress," Kali sniffed and went back in the house to prepare lunch.

"One always hopes," Magdelene sighed, "but it doesn't seem to do much good."

She had lived in the turquoise house on the hill for as long as anyone in the fishing village that held her closest neighbors could remember. Great-grandmothers had told little children how, when they were young, their great-grandmothers had told them that she had always been there. She had been there so long, in fact, that the villagers took her presence for granted and treated her much the same way as they treated the wind and the coral reef and the sea: with a friendly respect. It had taken them longer to accept Kali and the visible difference of red eyes and ivory horns, but that too had come in time. It had been years since it was considered unusual to see the demon housekeeper in the marketplace arguing over the price of fish. It was, how-

ever, still unusual to see her lose the argument.

Occasionally it was useful to have Magdelene for a neighbor.

"Carlos, there's a dragon in the harbor."

The village headman sighed and looked at the three heaps of kindling that had been fishing boats a very short time before. It had been a miracle that all six fishermen had survived. "Yes, M'lady, I know."

"I guess," Magdelene mused, squinting into the wind, her skirt and the two scarves she had wrapped around her breasts snapping and dancing about her, "I should go out and talk to him."

"I'll ready my boat." The headman turned to go but Magdelene held up her hand.

"Don't bother," she said. "Boats are tippy, unstable little things. I'll walk."

And she did. She got wet to about the knees—the swells made for uneven footing—but while the villagers watched in awe, (she'd never done *that* before) she walked out until she stood, bobbing gently up and down with the waves, about five body-lengths from the dragon.

"Well?" she asked.

"Gertz?" replied the huge silver sea-dragon, extraordinarily puzzled. This was outside his experience as well. He turned his head so he could fix her in one opalescent eye.

Magdelene put her hands on her hips.

"Go on," she said firmly. "Shoo!"

The dragon, recognizing the voice of authority, however casual, suddenly decided there was much better fishing further south, and left.

The villagers cheered as Magdelene stepped back into the sand. She

grinned and curtsied, not gracefully but enthusiastically, then waved a hand at the wreckage. Wood, rope, canvas, and the few bits of metal received in trade for fish, shuddered, stirred, then danced themselves back into fishing boats.

Everyone stared in silent surprise. This was more than they'd dared hope for.

"We don't know how to thank you," the headman began, but his wife interrupted.

"Just say it, for Netos' sake," she muttered, knowing her husband's tendency to orate at the slightest provocation. "The Lady knows what she's done, she doesn't need you telling her."

Carlos sighed. "Thank you."

Magdelene twinkled at him. "You're welcome." Then she went home to browbeat Kali into baking something sweet for supper. She hadn't got half-way up the hill before the boats were putting out to replace the morning's lost catch.

Two days later the soldiers came.

"It is happening, Mistress."

"Yes, Kali, I know."

"What would you have me do?"

"I think," Magdelene shaded her eyes with her hand, "you should make lunch for six. We'll eat in the garden."

The captain had been sent by his king to bring back the most powerful wizard in the world. What he and the four soldiers he'd brought with him were supposed to do if the wizard refused to cooperate was beyond him. Die, he suspected. The wizard had been ridiculously easy to find, leg-ends—and the memory of some of them caused him to shift uneasily on his saddle—had led him right to her.

He wasn't sure what he'd expected but it wasn't a forty-year-old woman with laughing eyes and a sunburned nose who was barely dressed.

"I'm looking," he said stiffly, stopping his small troop at the gate in the coral wall, "for Magdelene, the Wizard."

"You're looking at her." Magdelene liked large, well-muscled men with grizzled beards—even if they were wearing too much clothing—so she gave the captain her best smile.

The captain showed no visible reaction but behind him, young Colin smiled back. The most powerful wizard in the world reminded him of his Aunt Maya.

"I am here to take you to Bokta..."

"Where in the Goddess' creation is that?"

"North," he said flatly; worship of the Goddess had been outlawed in Bokta for several dozen years. "Very far north."

"Why does he always go north?" Magdelene asked Silk, who had shown up to see what was going on. "What's wrong with east, or west, or even further south?"

Silk neither knew nor cared; and as she didn't much like horses, she padded off to find some shade.

Magdelene looked up to find the captain glaring at her and was instantly, although not very sincerely, contrite. "Oh, I'm sorry. You were saying?"

"I am here to take you to Bokta so you may prove yourself to be the most powerful wizard in the world. My king does not believe you are."

"Really? And who told him I wasn't?"

A small smile cracked the captain's beard. "I believe it was his wizard."

"I'll bet," said Magdelene dryly.

"And if I don't come?"

"Then I'm to tell you that the wizard will destroy twenty people daily from the time I return without you until you appear."

Magdelene's eyes went hard. "Will he?"

"Yes."

"That son of a bitch!" She considered that for a moment and grinned ruefully at her choice of phrase. "We can leave tomorrow. I'd travel faster on my own but we'd best follow procedure."

She stepped back and the five men rode into the yard. Suddenly there was no gate in the corral wall.

"Oh, put that away," she chided a nervous soldier, who clutched his sword in an undeniably threatening manner. "If those great big horses of yours can't jump a three-foot wall, even in this heat, you're in trouble. Besides, you couldn't kill me if you wanted to. I've been dead, and it isn't all it's cracked up to be."

The sword remained pointed at her throat.

"Garan!" snapped the captain.

"But sir..."

"Put it away!"

"Yes, sir."

The captain swung off his horse. "Then we are your prisoners."

"Don't be ridiculous, you're my guests. Unsaddle your horses and turn them loose over there. They'll be well taken care of." She turned and headed for the garden. "Then you can join me for lunch. I hope you like shrimp." She paused and faced them again, noting with amusement that they were looking slightly stunned. "And please don't draw on my housekeeper, her feelings are easily hurt."

•

A small problem arose the next morning.

"You have no horse?" the captain asked incredulously.

Magdelene shook her head. "I can't ride. No sense of rhythm." She slapped her hands in front of her to illustrate the point. "I go one way, the horse goes another and we meet in the middle. Incredibly uncomfortable way to travel."

As children in Bokta rode before they walked, it hadn't occurred to the captain that the wizard would not have a horse. Or that she'd be unwilling to get one.

"Never mind," she said comfortably, "we'll stop by the village on our way and borrow Haylio's donkey and cart."

"Donkey and cart?" repeated the captain weakly.

"He's not very fast but I can sit in a cart with the best of folk." She waved a hand and the gate reappeared in the wall.

"Mistress—" Kali stood in the garden. "When will you return?"

"How long will it take us to get to this Bokta place?" Magdelene queried the captain who, in company with his men, was eyeing Kali nervously. Garan had his hand on his sword.

"Uh, about three months."

"Then expect me back in about three months plus a day. After all," she added for her escort's benefit, "I don't intend to take the scenic route back. And you," she wagged a finger at Silk who was lying at Kali's feet. "You take care of yourself, and no more lizards."

Silk inspected a perfectly groomed silver paw and refused to answer.

It was a strange cavalcade that moved north along the coast road: five great

warhorses carrying overdressed and sweaty soldiers, bracketing a medium-sized donkey pulling a two-wheeled cart and the most powerful wizard in the world.

Magdelene sang loudly and tunelessly as they travelled, her songs usually the type gently bred females were not supposed to know.

"Madam!" The captain had stood it as long as he was able.

A bawdy lyric, in an impossible key, faded to silence. "Something troubling you?"

"It's that song..."

"Oh? Am I corrupting your men?"

"No, but you're scaring the horses."

For a moment the captain anticipated being turned into something unpleasant, then Magdelene threw back her head and laughed long and hard.

"Point taken," she gasped when the laughter finally let her talk. "I've no music at all and I know it. Do you sing, Captain?"

"No."

She grinned up at him. "Pity. I'm very..." She paused and her smile grew thoughtful as she remembered. "...amiable to men who make music."

On his way back to the front of the line the captain almost succeeded in not wondering just how amiable this wizard could be.

The soldiers treated Magdelene with a mixture of fear and respect, fear winning most often, for their king's wizard had taught them to dread the breed; all save Colin, who treated her much the same as he treated his Aunt Maya. Magdelene, who had never been anyone's aunt, slipped happily into the role and Colin became the only one of the fair-skinned northerners to stop burning and peeling and burning again.

"Well, I don't care what you say," growled Garan. "Ain't nobody's aunt can grab a fistful of fire, then sit there tossing it from hand to hand."

"I don't think she was aware she was doing it."

"And that makes it better? Hummph."

They reached Denada in three and a half weeks. Even forced to the donkey's pace, that was two days faster than it had taken going the other way.

The captain sighed in relief; he'd about had it with the perpetual heat of the southlands. Even the rain was warm. He spurred his horse towards the city gate.

"Uh, Sir!"

"Now what?" He wheeled around, narrowly missed running down a farmer with a basket of yams on his head, and was soundly cursed. When he reached the cart, Magdelene removed her small bundle of belongings and was kissing the soft grey muzzle of the donkey.

"What are you doing?"

She grinned up at him. "What does it look like? I'm kissing the donkey."

Colin snickered but managed to school his expression before the captain could look his way.

The captain sighed. "Metros give me strength," he prayed. "Why are you kissing the donkey?"

"Because I'm sending him home."

She flicked the animal between his eyes with the first two fingers of her left hand.

Half a startled bray hung on the air, but the donkey and the cart were gone.

"Can your Aunt Maya do that?" hissed Garan.

Colin had to admit she couldn't.

"Why not send us to Bokta that

way," demanded the captain, walking his horse through the space where the donkey had been, making sure it had truly vanished, "and avoid all this damned travelling."

"I know where I've been," Magdelene replied gravely, "but even I don't know where I'm going to be until I get there." She shouldered her bag and headed for the gate. The captain and his men could only follow.

The five northern soldiers on their massive war horses made little stir as they moved the width of the city, from the gate to the harbor. After all they had been there less than two months before and Denada, a cosmopolitan city with traders arriving daily from exotic places, saved its wonder for the truly unusual. Only a few street whores took any notice of the men, and no one at all noticed the most powerful wizard in the world.

Denada's harbor was huge: twenty ships could tie up, and there was room for another twelve to ride at anchor. Miraculously, the *Raven*, the ship that had carried the soldiers across the inland sea, was still docked and appeared to have just finished loading.

"Two months!" screamed her master, bounding down the gangway. "Two months I sit here since you leave. First, I must clean smell of abominable animals out of my forward hold though still it smells like a stable then what happens but my steersman—may his liver be eaten by cockroaches—sets sail with a hangover we come up bang on coral and rip off half of keel. It is a miracle—may all the gods in heaven be blessed and I don't doubt they are—that we make it back for repairs. Now at last we are ready to sail." He pounded the captain's shoulder enthusiastically. "So, what can I do for you?"

"I need passage north for myself, my men and our horses. And for this lady here."

"Aiee, again with the horses!" He didn't give Magdelene, who was dropping stale journey bread into the water to feed the fish, a second glance. "Still, already I have a hold that smells like a stable. Fourteen gold pieces."

"All right, I..."

"Two," said Magdelene, her eyes glinting dangerously as she dusted crumbs off her hands.

The ship's master stared accusingly at the captain. "I thought you said she was a lady? Fourteen I say and fourteen it is."

After a spirited discussion, they settled on eight. The captain paid up, and Magdelene deftly lifted four gold pieces from his pouch.

"Hey!"

"You're still up two," she said sweetly. "While you load the horses, I'm going shopping."

"Don't tell me," muttered Garan, stopping Colin before he could speak. "Your Aunt Maya loves to shop."

Hours passed, the ship was ready to sail on the evening tide and Magdelene had still not returned. Both worried and annoyed, the captain walked to the end of the docks to look for her. He was considering a trip into the city when she came barreling around a corner, a grimy urchin heavily laden with packages in tow, and crashed into his arms.

"Here, take these." She shoved the parcels at him and tossed the boy a silver piece. "Thanks for the help, kid, now beat it before the mob gets here."

"Where have you been?" demanded the captain as they trotted towards the ship. "We're ready to leave. Why are we running an..." He stopped. "Mob? What mob?"

Magdelene got him moving again. "I cured a blind beggar. It drew a bit of a crowd. Good thing the kid knew a short cut."

They sprinted up the gangway just as the leading edge of the mob appeared at the end of the docks. A cry went up as Magdelene was spotted.

"Why didn't you do something a little less spectacular," muttered the captain, tossing the packages over the rail, then vaulting it himself. "Like raising the dead."

"I did that the last time." She accepted his helping hand, having somehow managed to become tangled in a stray line. "This time I was trying to keep a low profile."

"You've been here before then."

"Twice."

"Well, maybe next time you can pass through without starting a riot." He shouted to the ship's master to cast off but it was unnecessary. The instant Magdelene's foot touched the deck, ropes untied themselves and the *Raven* slipped its mooring just ahead of the first hysterical Denadan.

"Why," asked the captain, using the toe of his boot on a package in danger of going overboard, "does the most powerful wizard in the world in the have to run from a crowd of shopkeepers and beggars?"

Magdelene collapsed on a bale of rope. "I'll let you in on a secret," she panted. "I'm also the laziest wizard in the world. Running was definitely the least complicated thing to do."

The trip across the inland sea had never been done faster. The *Raven* seemed to barely touch the waves and the wind never left her sails.

"I don't like boats," Magdelene explained when the captain voiced his

suspicions about the wind. "They make me sick. It's worse than being pregnant."

He stared at her in surprise. He'd never thought of her having a life like other women.

"You had children?"

"Have," she corrected, and it wasn't just the sea that chased the laughter from her eyes. "One. A son. Goddess knows why I ever let his father talk me into it."

"He could make music," the captain suggested.

Some of the laughter returned. "He could at that."

The ship rolled, and the most powerful wizard in the world turned slightly green.

"Oh, lizard piss!" she muttered and headed for the rail.

The *Raven* docked in Finera in eighteen days. The previous record was twenty-seven.

"Anytime you want to travel the seas, Lady Wizard, you are most welcome to sail with me."

Magdelene smiled stiffly at the ship's master, "Next time I travel, I'll walk." She gripped Colin's arm tightly as he helped her down the gangway. "Sometimes I think he situates himself purposefully so that I have to travel by sea."

Colin looked puzzled.

"Never mind, dear. Just get me somewhere that isn't moving."

"Take her to the Laughing Boar," bellowed the captain over the squeals of the horse being lifted from the hold. "We'll spend the night."

The Laughing Boar was the largest inn in Finera and a favorite with the caravan masters who came into the city to trade with ships from the south. As

they crossed the common room, Magdelene counted fifteen different dialects; one of which she was surprised to note, she didn't know. Her room was large and cheerful and so, she observed with satisfaction, was the bed.

"This ought to make him sit up and take notice." She winked at her reflection, now clad in a dangerously low cut green silk gown, and went looking for the captain.

Later that night he sat on the edge of her bed, suddenly unsure.

"What's wrong?" she asked, gently tweaking a wiry curl.

He caught her hand. "Did you use your magic to bring me here?"

She smiled and there was nothing, and everything, magic in the smile. "Only the magic that women have been using on men since the Goddess created the world."

"Oh." He considered for a moment. "That's all right then." And he lowered himself to her lips.

Next morning, as he left Magdelene's room, the captain bumped into Colin in the corridor. The young man executed a parade-ground perfect salute and marched briskly off down the hall, his face a study in suppressed laughter.

"Smart-assed kid," muttered the captain, straightened his tunic, and stomped off to find breakfast.

"Will we have to camp in this?" Magdelene asked anxiously, watching water stream off the shield she had raised over the entire group. Even Garan was forced to agree there were certain advantages in travelling with a wizard.

"Not for a while," Colin reassured her. "We follow the Great North Road

over half the way, and it seems to be lined with inns."

Magdelene eyed the broad back of the captain. "Good."

"I'd like to see you claim resemblance to your Aunt Maya now." Garan wiped foam off his mouth onto his sleeve. "She's used her blasted magic to bewitch the captain."

"That's all you know," Colin chuckled, finishing his own ale. "My family lives in the capital and the captain has bedded Aunt Maya."

When they reached the border of Bokta, a full division of the king's guard awaited them, darkly impressive in their black and silver armor.

"This is the best you could do?" sneered the guard captain, staring disdainfully down his narrow nose at Magdelene in her pony cart. "The king and his wizard are not going to be pleased."

It had been a long trip and Magdelene was not in the best of moods. "How would you like to spend the rest of your life as a tree frog?" she asked conversationally.

The guard captain ignored her. "Can't you keep her quiet?" he drawled, ennui dripping from the words.

It was difficult to say who was more surprised, the division of king's guard or the tree frog clinging to the saddle of the guard captain's horse.

"Magdelene," sighed the captain, "change him back."

"He's a pompous ass," Magdelene protested sulkily.

"Granted, but he's also the king's favorite nephew. Please."

"Oh, all right." She waved her hand. The guard captain cheeped once, found himself back in his own body,

and fainted. It was a rather subdued trip into the capital.

The king's wizard stirred the entrails of the goat with the tip of his bloody knife. She was here, in the palace, and when he defeated her he would be the most powerful wizard in the world! Power. He could feel burning through him, lighting fires of destruction that he would release to obliterate this woman, this Magdelene.

He wiped the knife on a skin taken whole off a stillborn babe, twitched his robes into place, and left his sanctum. Behind him, blood began to drip off the table and form a pool on the carpet.

The king was waiting in corridor, nervously pacing up and down. He stopped when the wizard emerged, and his two men-at-arms thankfully fell into place behind him.

"She's in the palace. We must hurry or we won't be in the throne room when she arrives."

The wizard merely nodded curtly. His measured stride didn't change.

"You are sure you can defeat her?" The king, left standing, scrambled to catch up.

"I have studied for over a hundred years. I command the demons of the Netherworld. I control the elements. I can easily defeat one ancient woman."

Magdelene's actual appearance came as a bit of a shock to both men. The crystal had only ever shown her location, never the wizard herself. This was the most powerful wizard in the world? This laughing woman who wasn't even wearing wizardly robes? The king almost chuckled as he took his seat.

Magdelene approached the throne with the captain, bowed when he did, and

clicked her tongue when she looked up at the king's wizard. Thick grey hair sprang from a widow's peak and curled on his shoulders, his eyes were sunken black pits, his nails were claws on the end of long and skinny fingers, and his stooped body was covered in a black robe so closely embroidered with cabalistic symbols that from a distance it looked more gold than black.

"If he'd just once realize that self-control comes first," she hissed to the captain as a herald announced them.

The whispers of the court fell silent as the king's wizard stepped forward. "I have summoned you to prove yourself," he declared in ponderous tones, blue fire crackling eerily about him.

The captain shifted his weight so that his cloak fell free of his sword. He had always hated this wizard, this scrawny grey scarecrow of a man, and had it not been for the innocent lives that would have been forfeit he would have never brought Magdelene here to him. At least not after he'd got to know her.

Magdelene successfully fought the urge to giggle. "Interesting outfit, Tristan. Demon-made?"

"My name is Polsarr," snarled the wizard, his lips pulled back over startlingly white teeth.

"Your name," said Magdelene mildly, "is Tristan. I should know, I gave it to you. And now," she turned to the king, "I'd like to be shown to my room, it's been a long trip."

"You are not going anywhere, woman!" bellowed Polsarr. "Until I banish you into darkness!"

"Oh? And would you have everyone say that you defeated the most powerful wizard in the world only because she was exhausted and irritable from four days of bumping over incredibly bad roads?"

The king tugged on Polsarr's sleeve. "We don't want that! There must be no doubt when you win."

Polsarr glowered and muttered but finally had to agree the king was right. "Enjoy your rest," he snarled. "It will be your last." He stalked from the room.

"If he really wants to prove his power," Magdelene muttered to the king, "he should do something about those roads."

The king ignored that. "Captain, take her to the south tower in the east wing. And Captain, you and your men will guard this wizard one more night."

The captain bowed and backed away. Magdelene gave the king her second-best smile and followed.

At the tower—which was as far away from the rest of the palace as it was possible to get and still be in the palace—the captain dismissed his men.

"Be back at dawn," he told them. "Even if the king's wizard decides to attack tonight, there's nothing you could do."

Colin raised an eyebrow at the phrasing but he went with the rest.

The tower was deserted and, judging by the unbroken layer of dust, hadn't been used in years. Magdelene waved a hand at her bag and it trailed them up the stairs.

"The man's as big an ass as the king's nephew."

There was no need to ask who she meant.

"He's not much like you."

"Thank you. He's not much like his father either. That man didn't have an ambitious bone in his body." She sighed. "Maybe I should've encouraged the kid's musical talents."

The captain threw open a door leading to an old-fashioned bedchamber.

"If I remember correctly, this is the only furnished room in the tower."

Magdelene stepped inside, the bag settling to the floor at her feet. "It's not that bad the bed looks solid enough for one night at least." She grinned over her shoulder at the captain, only to find him hesitating in the doorway. "What's wrong?"

"I'll stand guard in the hall. "You'll need your strength for tomorrow."

"And I want your strength tonight," she told him gently, drawing him into the room and shutting the door.

Some hours later the captain untangled himself from her embrace and rolled over on his back. "Is there anything," he asked, trying to get his breath back, "that you don't do well?"

Magdelene ran her fingers through the matted hair on his chest. "I'm a lousy mother," she admitted.

Everyone with a plausible excuse crowded into the throne room the next morning. People were packed so tightly against the walls they had to cooperate with their neighbors in order to breathe. Even the queen, who hated public functions and wanted only to be left alone, was there. The king was almost quivering with excitement, anticipating when he would control the most powerful wizard in the world. Polsarr stood alone in the centre of the room.

When Magdelene entered, the room released a collective sigh. She had not escaped in the night.

Leaving the captain and his men by the door, Magdelene walked forward until she stood only three body-lengths from her son.

"Morning, Tristan. Sleep well?"

Polsarr ignored the question. He drew himself up to his full height and declared, "Already I have defeated

seven lesser mages."

"Seven," said Magdelene. "Imagine that."

"I banished even the mighty Joshuae to the Netherworld!" He saw what he thought was worry in Magdelene's eyes and chuckled.

Magdelene wasn't worried. She was annoyed. "You banished Joshuae to the Netherworld? That was remarkably rude; the man is your name-father."

"I HAVE NO NAME-FATHER!"

His outraged volume was impressive.

"Well, you don't now, that's for sure. I only hope he finds his way back."

"I WAS BORN IN THE BELLY OF THE MOUNTAIN AND SPEWED FORTH WITH FIRE AND MOLTEN ROCK!"

Magdelene sighed. "And the time before this you were ripped from the loins of the North Wind. The time before that," her brows wrinkled, "I don't remember the time before that but it was equally ridiculous I'm sure. Now can we get on with this?"

Polsarr shrieked with wordless rage and blue lightning leapt from his fingertips.

Magdelene stood unconcerned and the lightning missed.

A fireball grew in Polsarr's hand. When it reached the size of a wagon wheel he threw it. And then another. And then another.

Magdelene disappeared with the fire. The flames burnt viciously for a moment, then suddenly died down. Although the floor was blackened and warped, Magdelene wasn't even scorched.

Polsarr screamed a hideous incantation, spittle flying from his lips to sizzle on the floor. There was a blinding red

flash between the wizards...and then a demon.

The demon was three times the size of a man, with green scaled skin and burning red eyes. Six-inch tusks drew its mouth back into a snarl and poisons dripped from the scimitar-shaped talons that curved out from both hands and feet. It raised heavily muscled arms, screamed, and lurched towards Magdelene.

Magdelene looked it right in the eye.

The demon stopped screaming.

She folded her arms across her chest and her foot began to tap.

The demon paused and reconsidered. Suddenly recognition dawned. It gave a startled shriek and vanished.

Polsarr began to gather darkness about him but Magdelene raised her hand.

"Enough," she sighed, and snapped her fingers.

When the smoke cleared, the most powerful wizard in the world cradled a baby in her arms. Polsarr's robe lay empty on the floor, and the wizard was nowhere to be seen.

"Here, hold this." She handed the baby to the king. "I want to say goodbye to some people." She walked to the door where the captain and his men still stood. The silence was overwhelming as the audience tried very hard not to attract the wizard's attention.

"Colin."

The young man stepped forward, for the first time a little afraid.

"This is for you." She wrestled a silver ring with three blue stones off her finger. "There aren't many wizards left in the world, but should you run foul of one this will protect you." Then she grinned and everything was all right. "Only from wizards though: it won't

raise a finger against outraged fathers." She pulled a string of coral beads out of the air and dropped them on his palm. "These are for your Aunt Maya." Reaching up, she pulled his head down until she could whisper in his ear. "Tell her I said..."

Magdelene paused, glanced at the captain, and snickered in a very unwizardlike way. "Never mind, if we're as much alike as you seem to think, she'll come up with it on her own." A kiss on the forehead and she released him. "Come and visit me some time."

"I will."

She moved over to the captain and took both his hands in hers. "It won't be very safe here for you now. You were responsible for me, and I defeated the king's wizard."

They both turned to look at the king who was holding the baby as if he'd rather be holding the demon.

The captain smiled down at her. "I was thinking of leaving the king's service anyway."

"That might be a good idea. You can always come and stay with me; young Tristan is going to need a father figure." She gurgled with laughter at the look of terror on his face, kissed him hard enough to carry the feel of his lips away with her, and went to collect her son.

"You really should keep a better eye on him," she said to the queen, with a nod to the king who was rubbing at the damp spot on his knee.

And then she vanished.

"Not again, Mistress," sighed Kali as Magdelene handed her the baby.

"Sure looks that way." Magdelene sighed as well, then grinned at a suddenly inspired thought. "See if you can find him a lute!" she called after the demon and went to look for Silk and her kittens. •

TANYA HUFF, the author of twelve books and over fifteen short stories, lives and writes in rural Ontario. When she's not writing, she's in the garden wondering what the hell is eating the tops off the radishes. "Third Time Lucky" was her first professional sale, and was originally published in the November, 1986 issue of *Amazing Stories*.

ILLUSTRATOR: JAMES BEVERIDGE was weaned in Windsor, Ontario, and is now maturing in Edmonton. He works in line, color, and pixel. His abiding adoration of visionary prose and image is rooted in the core of his being. Hey, it's also a lot o' fun.

BONES

Jason Kapalka
illustrated by Robert Boerboom

I found the first, the skull I mean, in the backyard garden. I'm not much of a gardener myself, I was just turning the dirt over a bit for Lauren, for when she came out to plant her seeds and whatever— and there it was, staring up from in between my feet. There was something about it, like something I heard once, that there are certain images in the brain you're born with. You never learn them, they're just there, like a baby knowing what a person looks like though it's never seen one before. A skull is the same way, I think, like you could be driving down the road at a hundred miles an hour and if there was a skull off in the ditch you'd still see it.

Anyway I guess I shouted, though I didn't scream like Lauren thought when she came running out of the house, like I'd chopped off a hand or a foot or something. We both stared down at the skull. I sure didn't like the look of the thing, but Lauren picked it up like it was a toy. She just seemed happily surprised, not worried that there was some kind of dead thing in the garden.

It wasn't a human skull, that much was obvious even to me. It was about the same size, but sort of stretched out, with these long oval eyesockets. Lauren said it looked old. I wasn't so sure. It was brown and yellow and kind of cracked, but what does that prove?

I didn't think much of letting her keep it, I just remember it didn't seem worthwhile to argue about it. She washed it off and put it in a box downstairs. Why? I asked, and she just said she was curious about it. Well, okay, I said.

When she came in and showed me the next thing, it must have been two or



three days later, naturally I wanted to know where she'd found it, just a normal question, no reason for her to lie about it. But how could it have been in the flowerbed which I remember her digging and planting just a few weeks ago? I mean, obviously it had come from the garden again, and that was what I resented really, not her wanting to keep the second bone, just her not telling me the truth.

She got angry when I confronted her about it, but as usual didn't come out and admit it, instead getting very calm and insisting that yes, it had been in the flowerbed out front, and what reason could she possibly have to lie about such a thing? But anyway, the thing, the second bone, looked like a boomerang, about two feet long with a funny curve in the middle. It made me nervous on account of thinking, what kind of animal did *that* come from? But she wanted to keep that one too.

I've put up with worse from Lauren, so I thought I'd just ride it out, wait till she forgot about her backyard archaeology and then throw the damn things out. Seemed the easiest thing to do, but then one night when Phil and his wife came over for a barbecue I realized she wasn't forgetting at all. Me and Phil were just standing around, talking about whether or not Andy was going to get the boot from the plant where we work, when Lauren comes out of the house with that box.

Oh come on, I said. She said she wanted to show it to Phil's wife who had studied paleontology or anthropology or something in college. Great, just the thing to get our appetites up, I said, but she went ahead anyway. Phil's wife mustn't have studied the right

ology, though, because she didn't have any better idea than me what kind of animal the bones were from, though she tried to cover up her ignorance with some jabber about strange phylas, or something like that. I guess it would have blown over and not gotten embarrassing, except that when we went over to the little firepit in the back yard, sure enough, what does Phil pick up? Another weird bone, about the size and shape of a matchbook. You would have thought it was a fragment from a bigger piece except it was all smooth, with funny little ridges running around it. Got a regular ancient Indian burial site here, don't you, he laughed.

Well, there were a lot of the sort of stupid jokes you'd expect then, Agatha Christie plots etc. etc., and they all seemed to find it pretty funny. Of course Lauren didn't realize they were laughing at *us*, not the stupid bones. Hey, you ever see *Poltergeist*? Yeah, ha ha.

I don't understand why you're getting so upset about this, she said after. I wasn't getting upset. I said, I just wonder why someone had to bring out a bunch of filthy dead things during dinner, I wonder why they went and did that? She said, I can't talk to you, I can see you're in your stupid mood today.

Well, I guess with me that'll pass, won't it, I said.

Things were a little strained for the next while with me and Lauren so I volunteered for some overtime shifts at the plant. I enjoyed it more than I would have squabbling with Lauren, anyway.

But of course as with anything you ignore, the problem didn't go away, it just got worse. I looked in the box one

day and there weren't three bones in there, there were six. The new ones were just as strange as the others. There was a curve that might have been a rib except it went almost all the way around, like a hoop with a bite out of it. Then there was a straight solid bone like a tube, and this pyramid thing with little round dimples.

Lauren when asked was evasive, as usual these days. Flowerbed again, I said. No, I found two of them in the garden when I was planting seeds, she said. That's impossible, I told her, I dug up the whole thing and I didn't see anything like that. Well, that's where they were. Well, what about the other one then? She said, I found *that* one in the basement.

We argued for a while but later when she was calmer I got the story she insisted on, that she was cleaning up some junk down there and found the bitten-hoop bone behind our old TV set. Well, where do you think it came from, I said, and she said she didn't know, but that part of the wall down there was crumbling a little and maybe that's where.

The walls are crumbling, I said. Are they.

I don't know, maybe I was being unfair to her but it seemed somehow it couldn't be unconnected. Didn't she think it was funny how all these bones start turning up just when she's having an obsession with dead things? Calm again, no, she said, I don't think there's any causal relation there, but if you do I guess it's you that's got the obsession.

All right, I told her, I guess I do, I guess I have an obsession with the fact that there are weird rotting old bones under and in the house I put down a

year's salary on, and, oh yeah, the walls are crumbling too, I guess you're right, yeah I must have some kind of obsession all right.

I can't talk to you right now.

Oh, I must be having a stupid mood again.

So then she gave up on the calm act.

Eventually she stomped off to the bedroom and I went out, thought about going to a movie, thought about going to a friend's place, but it didn't seem worth the effort so I just drove around watching the scenery go away. There's a tree, there's a house, there's a boy walking his dog, but at thirty miles an hour they're there and they're gone, you don't have to stare them in the face for years on end.

But I came back and Lauren calmed down, for real, and I tried to put it out of my mind. We avoided talking about the bones, but I did have someone come in to look at the basement wall. It's an older house, he told me, what can you expect? I'm not sure what I expected, I said, but it sure wasn't this.

In August it started to rain a lot and then it got worse, everything. I went outside and stepped in a puddle and felt something crunch, looked down and it looked like a chicken bone but it wasn't. Lauren found what looked like a miniature human ribcage in the washoff under the water spout, or at least she said she found it there. Towards the end of the month another section of the basement wall fell in, and in and around the wet concrete there were bits of cracked yellow-brown bone.

I called the insurance company, but the guy just asked me if the bones had

been there in the house when I bought it. I didn't see them, I said. But could they have been there already? I guessed they could have been. Well then, he said, you see the problem?

I couldn't sleep. How could I when the house was falling apart around me. Can't sell it, who'd buy after taking one look? The mortgage was hanging around my neck for the next twenty-three years. Lauren was no use, she said it would be all right and we'd do some repairs ourself in the spring, but really what did she care? It wasn't her paycheck that got swallowed every month.

I started to screw up at work because of it all. Lauren couldn't grasp the kind of pressures I was under and insisted on annoying me in little ways. Her obsession with the bones was becoming psychotic and things seemed to happen because of it. I went into the washroom and when I turned the faucet there was no water, just a gurgling and rattling sound. A second later brown sludge starts coughing out of it, the mesh pops out, and there are little pings as these tiny bones, they look like teeth, hit the porcelain and go down the drain.

I called the plumber and they said two days, so I get to go to work stinking and unshaved. I'm not stupid, I tell them when they finally call me into the office, I'm just having a few problems at home right now, okay? But they're more supportive than critical, and eventually we decide together I should take a week vacation to straighten things out. Supportive, yeah, but there's that humorous look they have when they say straighten things out, and suddenly I'm sure Phil's been talk-

ing around since that barbecue. But I have to smile and take it like I don't know.

I get home and Lauren in this quiet scaredy-mouse way that she knows will annoy me tells me that the rain must be seeping into the walls, there's a whole section in our bedroom going wet and soft. And this just happened naturally? I said. This just had to happen while I was away? I don't know what you're talking about, she said in that little fake mousy voice. Oh no? I went into the bedroom and started punching and tearing at the soggy dry-wall, and when it falls apart a tangle of slimy bones collapses into the room. There are a couple more long corkscrew skulls in the mess. Here's a few extra for your collection, I said. This isn't my fault, she told me, I didn't do anything. No of course not, it must just be your lucky day.

Next day another section of wall fell in, in the living room, and there was what looked like a whole skeleton glistering on the carpet, all disjointed. There were rods and tubes and things that I knew didn't come from a human skeleton, but still there was an eerie resemblance.

The basement flooded later on. There were things floating in it brown and yellow. More teeth came out of the faucet despite the plumber's huge bill and this time I saved them from going down the drain.

Lauren finally stopped pretending to cry and hugged me and said she was sorry for whatever she'd done, and why didn't we just go to a hotel, send for people to come have a look at the house and see what was wrong. Call the museum or university about the

bones, maybe, see if they knew anything. Oh yeah, I said, that's great, let's turn the place into a goddam side-show, yeah, honey, that's a swell idea. That's fucking brilliant.

She kept arguing and, you know, I guess I got a bit mad. I guess I maybe got out of hand for a minute there, not like it wasn't provoked, not like I didn't have reasons, but all the same maybe I got a bit carried away for a minute or two.

Lauren ran off then but I didn't really care. I collected all the bones. There were shoals of them drifting around in the basement, more of them sticking up out of the grass in the front yard, and I brought them all into the living room and put them on the carpet which was ruined by then anyway. I started thinking how they could go together, how this piece would fit onto this other piece, and then I got some masking tape and contact cement and tried it. After a while I had something, I wasn't sure if it was how they had gone together in the first place, but it was possible, it looked solid, sturdy enough to withstand centuries of age and weather, it looked a little bit like me. I took my shirt and pants off and put them on it and they fit okay. I picked it up and it was light but held together, and I went into the bedroom and was surprised to see Lauren in there sleeping. She must have come back in earlier without my noticing. I was, I admit, I was distracted. I felt guilty about leaving her alone so I put the thing on my side of the bed. She always said I was bony anyway.

I didn't want to wake her up so I went out into the living room and fell asleep on the couch in my shorts, hav-

ing moved all the bones into a big heap on the carpet.

I was woken up in the morning when Lauren shrieked and came running out of the bedroom, making this weird blubbering sound. I couldn't help it, I started laughing. She just looked so funny standing there in her underwear like that.

She got hysterical and started crying and ran out of the house with nothing but her purse and her coat, and it was still raining, so I guess she must have been cold. But I didn't see her again after that so I can't say for sure.

Anyway there was more work to do in the living room and I got started. Here I had something that might have been a dog with one eye and three legs, but it looked good on the coffee table. Lauren always wanted a dog, but I just told her I was allergic. I brought the other thing out of the bedroom, and it looked like it wanted to watch TV, so I put it on the couch and crossed what might have been its legs. And here was its baby boy or girl with its long snouted skull that I had to glue on, and it wanted to sit beside father and watch TV too.

I keep thinking the rain will stop, but it just seems to keep on and on. In the flooded basement there are always more bones floating up, and sometimes I think that sooner or later I'll have them all and I'll be able to figure out where they came from, what they are, dinosaurs or something, but at other times I don't think I ever will. I don't think I ever will know. The water downstairs must be getting into the wiring, because once in a while the power goes, and upstairs where we're watching TV it gets dark, sometimes for

a few seconds, sometimes for almost an hour, and then I just sit there beside the other two and listen to the rain.

I wish Lauren would come back. I've started to look at some of the bones, thinking, this curve reminds me of her back, this reminds me of her leg just above the knee, and how they might fit together, and sooner or later I'm afraid I'll try it. I'm scared of what'll

happen then. When they're all done I'm scared they won't need me any more and when the lights and TV go off for good I'll just sit here beside them, watching the blue light from the window shining off the tops of their heads. Watching them smiling. As if they could do anything else. And their hands linked together on the couch. •

JASON KAPALKA is a former Safeway clerk, vacuum cleaner salesman, deep-sea squid fisherman and Portuguese short-order cook now living in Edmonton. He's recently completed an as-yet unsold screenplay, which in best Hollywood high-conceptese he describes as *"The Godfather meets Close Encounters, or Reservoir Dogs vs. E.T."* Like everyone else, he is currently working on a novel.

ILLUSTRATOR: ROBERT BOERBOOM hangs his hat, brushes and pencils in Brantford, Ontario. His current activities include a series of large paintings in collaboration with painter/curator Wayne Draper at the Gallery of Modern Art.



THE MONK AND THE OLD IDOL

Jamie Findlay
illustrated by Nancy Niles

It was Yu Meng, the novice monk, who found the sleeping girl. He had gone out at dawn to draw water and discovered her beside the well, her head in the crook of her arm, her breathing silent and regular. Her robe was of multicolored silk, embellished with gilt butterflies and dragons and smiling bats, and her eyelids were a delicate unhealthy blue. A princess, Yu Meng thought, or at least the daughter of a lord.

He shook her gently but she would not stir, and at length he had to carry her back through the rising mist to the monastery. There he placed her on a straw pallet just inside the temple hall. The other monks soon gathered around, and the abbot, Yen Sou, tried to rouse her by waving camphor and incense under her nose. Still she slept on. A charmed sleep, concluded Yen Sou, and added with a trace of the abbot's weariness: we must keep her safe till she awakes.

For the next few days the girl slept her unnatural sleep in the corner of the temple hall, while the monks came and went around her. Sometimes one would say a prayer over her in hope of breaking the spell, but her condition never changed. Yen Sou made the arduous trip down to the village only to find that the villagers knew nothing about the girl, and he returned looking worried. Magic and a beautiful girl did not mix well with the monastic life.

About a week after the girl's appearance, Yu Meng awoke with the feeling that some small alteration had taken place in the world. He rose from his pallet, put on a heavy sheepskin robe and slipped outside his tiny clay hut. The stars lay like rime across the enormous sky, and from nearby came the sound of the icy mountain wind, sighing through the hemlock that surrounded the monastery. He gathered his robe tighter about him and made his way to the temple hall. Just before the entrance he paused. Behind the clay-and-tile building, in the small garden that

served as a shrine, he caught a flicker of movement. Cautiously he went closer. At the far edge of the garden the girl was moving as if in a trance. She took no notice of Yu Meng as he approached.

The young man waited until he was in full view of the girl and then said clearly, "Lady, I am Yu Meng, a monk, and I am glad that you have finally woken to enjoy our garden, even if you have chosen the coldest hour of the night to do so."

She made no reply—indeed, did not appear to hear him—and Yu Meng went closer. He saw that her eyes were wide open and focused straight ahead, and that her feet were bare. He guessed then that she was merely sleepwalking and that the spell had not lifted. She seemed oblivious to the cold, and after watching her attentively for a minute Yu Meng decided to take her arm and guide her back to the temple hall. She went without resistance, but just in front of the temple entrance she paused before a small rhododendron tree that grew there. Till then she had given no indication that she was conscious of her surroundings, but she was obviously aware of the rhododendron. Slowly she raised her hands to it.

"What do you see, mistress?" asked Yu Meng.

She made no reply, just stood there with her hands out, a look of faint distress on her face. Eventually Yu Meng had to usher her inside, where he covered her with his robe and began kindling a fire. Soon Yen Sou appeared—he never slept well and always sensed when something was amiss in the monastery—and while the young monk prepared tea he rubbed the girl's hands and feet. All this time she sat quietly on

her pallet, gazing at nothing. When the tea was ready she took a few sips and then lay down at once, as if in response to a command. Her eyes closed and her breathing became regular. In a few seconds it was as if she had never moved.

"She is ever asleep, whether she walks or slumbers," said Yen Sou.

Yu Meng made no reply; he was thinking of the girl's face as she had gestured at the rhododendron.

The days passed, and the girl's condition did not change. She would only walk at night, and then for a few minutes; the rest of the time she slumbered on her pallet. At first the monks took turns sleeping in the temple hall, in order to follow her during the nightly walks; but it soon became apparent that she was perfectly safe. She never tried to leave the monastery and would always return to the temple hall by herself. After a while Yen Sou declared that she deserved some privacy even if she was enchanted. In all this no one asked for Yu Meng's help or advice, and he didn't presume to offer any. As a novice—the only novice in a small and isolated monastery—he had virtually no say in monastic affairs, and Yen Sou had decided early on that the less he had to do with the girl the better. But he became oddly attuned to the girl's sleeping existence and would often wake at night while she was walking. He never left his hut on these occasions—Yen Sou had explicitly forbidden that—but he would lie on his pallet and imagine her moving, a homeless ghost, through the garden.

One day Haizi the Itinerant came to the monastery to beg some food. The villagers all said that Haizi had been born

of a human and a gibbon, and he did look a bit like the latter—same long arms, same whip-like body, same white eyebrows against a tiny dark face. But he was generally treated with respect, for he knew some very useful herbs and potions and had (so he claimed) served in his youth as the court storyteller of the Grand Preceptor. The only ones who did not treat him with respect were the monks; they were not interested in his stories and had little food to spare him. Consequently, when he appeared at the monastery gates on this occasion, the monks gave him only a bit of food and sent him brusquely on his way.

But Yu Meng had other ideas. If anybody knew anything about the girl's affliction, he reasoned, it would be the beggar-sage Haizi; and soon after the little man had left, Yu Meng gathered together all the rice cakes he could find and slipped out of the monastery.

"Now, Haizi," he said, when he had caught up with the beggar, "I will give you all the food you can carry if you will advise me on a matter of sorcery."

"An arrangement I have frequently made," replied Haizi, "with the other party generally getting the better of the deal. But let us hear about this sorcery, Yu Meng."

He listened with narrowed eyes while the novice told him about the sleeping girl. At the end of the story he smiled a gibbon's wizened smile.

"So it is true!" he exclaimed. "A beautiful girl asleep among all those monks! How the Grand Preceptor would have loved that!"

Yu Meng then began to regret telling Haizi the story, for he was sure that the little man was even now making up

an impious tale about the situation. But Haizi seemed to guess his mind. "Don't worry, Yu Meng," he said. "You have come to me in confidence, and I never break confidences. Neither do I moralize. If a monk should take an interest in a sleeping girl—a circumstance which, incidentally, occurs with some regularity in all religious traditions—"

"What must we do to break the spell?" interrupted Yu Meng.

The little man pursed his lips. "That may be beyond your capabilities, my friend," he replied gravely. "For if you have described her symptoms correctly—"

"I have," said the monk.

"Then I would say she is a prisoner of a dream," concluded the other. "I've heard tell of the affliction."

He waited for a reply from the young man, but all he got was a frown; and eventually he continued in a pedagogue's voice: "You must know, Yu Meng, that when we dream our souls leave our bodies and journey to places far removed from our everyday lives, places fraught with danger. People say you can do anything in dreams, but that is not true. There are rules to follow and hazards to be avoided. Should a soul fall victim to one of these hazards, it may be unable to return to its body. When that happens, the body will continue to sleep as long as the soul is a prisoner of the dream."

"I find all that hard to believe," said Yu Meng, who, like most of the monks, was a rationalist.

Haizi shrugged. "What else could make a girl sleep for weeks on end? "

Yu Meng was silent; the little man had a point. After a moment he said, "And what are these dream hazards

you speak of?"

"They are too many to name," replied the little man. "Perhaps she tried to fly—everybody does eventually, in dreams—and was swept away to the far edges of the earth, or else mobbed by magpies. Or perhaps she got on the back of some untrustworthy creature like a dolphin, and her soul was carried off to a place that is inaccessible even to your holy men." He scratched himself. "Or yet again, perhaps she was the victim of an evil spirit who was *living* in a dream. Some magicians know the dreamworld well enough to enter it and work their mischief. One may well have taken a fancy to her soul and kidnapped it—for of course the soul is completely vulnerable in dreams, being unattached to its body."

"And if her soul is gone," pursued Yu Meng, "is it beyond recovery?"

Haizi shrugged again. "One does hear of dreamers being rescued from their own dreams, but the rescuer is almost always someone of extraordinary powers. In my lifetime I have known of only one person who could perform such a feat, and that was Wei Men-li, the famous hermitess and healer. Apparently she could enter the dreams of others from her own sleep. One night, for example, she journeyed far from her customary quiet slumbers in order to help a young man who suffered from horrible nightmares of drowning. On this night the young man was, as usual, near to expiring at the bottom of a dark dream lake; and Wei Men-li swam down to him, caught him up in her arms, and then willed herself to wake. The young man woke also from his dream, coughing and spluttering; and never again did he have nightmares of drowning."

"I see," said the monk. "But I am not sure how this helps me."

Haizi raised his eyebrows. "I did not say I could help you, Yu Meng; I am only telling you what I know. But my guess is that to free this girl you must enter her dream."

"Enter her dream," repeated Yu Meng warily.

"I know of no other way," affirmed Haizi. "The girl must still be alive in the dreamworld, for her body lives on in this one." He leaned closer to the monk. "I am assuming, of course, that she has not been transformed within her dream. If she has, I'm afraid she is as good as dead. Not even Wei Men-li could rescue a dreamer transformed. For in the night realms—so all the sages agree—two souls in different guises can have no influence on each other. Dream sorcerers know this, of course; it is the source of their power."

"Why are we talking as if these figments were real?" said the monk in exasperation. "Dreams are nothing more than the creation of our minds."

"The creation of our minds, yes," replied Haizi testily. "They are certainly that, Yu Meng, but believe me, they are also images of a distant reality. If the images are powerful enough they can draw you into that reality. And that reality can *hurt*. Dream mosquitoes will bite you and dream snow will freeze you and your dream mother-in-law will scold you if you sing love songs in her presence. Although I suppose this latter danger is not something you need worry about."

The monk was now fairly convinced that Haizi had been playing him for a fool the entire time, but all he said was, "And how do I enter the girl's dream?"

"Ah," said Haizi, "there I cannot

help you. Magicians and lovers have their ways, but of these I know nothing."

And politely taking his leave he went on his way, his sack filled with the rice cakes. The truth was, he rapidly tired of showing off his knowledge to the monks. They could be very obtuse in matters of magic.

Yu Meng kept quiet about Haizi's explanation, for he knew that the other monks would have considered it nonsense. He himself was inclined to that opinion. But as the girl remained in her deep slumber day after day, growing thinner and thinner, he began to wonder if there was anything to the beggar's theories. He took to stealing out and watching the girl at night, in frank violation of Yen Sou's edict. She was certainly in thrall to something that lay beyond the considerable natural knowledge of the monks. But if it was indeed a dream, how could he possibly get into it?

For Yu Meng was not an adventurous dreamer. When his soul left his sleeping body it was generally to help his father thatch the roof, or build kites with his brothers in the fields, or talk again with his long-dead grandmother, who had overseen his difficult birth on a rainy spring afternoon and christened him *Yu Meing* (which, in the northern dialect, means "spring shower"). Rarely did he visit the exotic and treacherous places where a beautiful girl might encounter grief.

But he knew he would have to learn more about the dreamworld in order to help the girl, and for the first time in his life he began to pay close attention to his dreams. Every night, figures from his village brushed past him in dreamlike haste, and though they never imparted

to him the wisdom he requested their very elusiveness gave him clues. A sustained touch, a close embrace, was so rare in dreams as to have the quality of an amulet. He remembered Wei Men-li catching up the young man in her arms, and then waking. To embrace the girl, shut her off from her dream, and wake at once—that was what he had to do. But by then he understood that the very medium of the dream might thwart such an action, for at crucial moments it often robbed the dreamer of reason and volition. Slowly, laboriously, he learned to slough off the dream paralysis, to keep his head in ludicrous situations, to wake exactly when he desired. Thus did he come to understand the power of the will in dreams, and by extension the power of the embrace. If a single will could weaken the grip of a dream, he reasoned, then two wills bound together might shatter it completely.

Never in all this dreaming did he even glimpse the girl, but as time went on he sensed he was drawing closer to her. So attuned to her presence did he become that he learned to hear her muted, precise breathing, and at night the sound would echo in his mind like the tides. He remembered his grandmother telling him once that in moments of distress, two sleepers sometimes breathed as one. If a sleeping child stopped breathing, the mother slumbering nearby would often respire for it. In a like manner—so the old woman had said—the night terrors of a child might be banished if mother and child breathed in concert.

And perhaps, thought the monk one night, Wei Men-li had breathed for the drowning man.

Yu Meng could not have said exactly what it was he had discovered; he simply knew he was ready to act. One clear night he took his pallet and stole from his hut into the temple hall. In the moonlight he could faintly make out the girl sleeping in the corner. Not far from her, in a small vestibule where the incense pots were stored, he cleared himself a space and laid his pallet down. He dared not risk sleeping close to the girl, for he knew that some of the monks sometimes came into the temple in the night. In the vestibule he was hidden from view.

Creeping close to the girl, he took from an inner pocket of her robe a sachet of herbs and flowers which she kept there. It smelled of jasmine and orange blossom and something else he could not identify. "I shall return this," he whispered, then made his way back to the vestibule and lay down. The sachet he placed on the pallet near his head, so that the complex scent—the girl's scent—would enter his mind as he slept. Stilling himself completely, he soon heard her very faint exhalation. After a while he was breathing in rhythm with her.

Several hours went by. He heard an owl calling far off, and mice scratching in the corner of the hall. Once a gust of cold air blew over him, but it was the girl who stirred and drew her rug tighter. In the dead of night he suddenly woke, without realizing he had been asleep. The girl was rising. He rose too, wrapping his robe about him, and followed her. As she passed out the door he fancied he felt the cold stones on his own feet.

Around the moonlit garden went the pair. She paused before the rhododendron, as was her wont, and at that

moment Yu Meng came close to her, his heart beating loudly in his ears. "Let me help you," he whispered. She blinked once but otherwise did not respond; and at length she returned to the temple hall and lay down. Yu Meng also sought out his own pallet, and now he found he could identify the mysterious scent in the sachet. It was rhododendron blossom.

He fell asleep before long, and dreamed then of a garden—a shrine, he knew, but not a shrine to his own gods.

Around him were yews and aspens and beautiful vivid rhododendrons, all festooned with vines and dripping with moisture. Bright exotic birds wheeled through the green light, and he could hear other creatures scuttling in the undergrowth. Directly in front of him was a small clearing, and here a feast had been set up—steaming soups both clear and thick as cream, and cooked turtle in a bed of rice and bean curd, and poached chicken flavored with cassia, and an entire roasted pig surrounded by eggs and onions and sprouts of something he could not name. Sitting behind the dishes was a small ugly man wearing a coronal of gold. His face reminded Yu Meng of a boar's face, and he was gnawing on a drumstick.

"Welcome, Yu Meng," said the man. "Sit down and eat; you get nothing but rice in that monastery of yours."

Yu Meng didn't like the look of the man, but he sat down anyway on a nearby stump.

"Your honor has the advantage of me," he said. "I am afraid I do not know whose feast I have disturbed."

"So polite, you monks!" replied the other. "I suppose that counts, in the long run." He took another bite of his

drumstick. "My name does not matter. Perhaps you have heard of it, perhaps not. Let us simply say that I am from the past, Yu Meng. I and my people ruled this land before your gods came to replace us. We killed and ate animals, and sometimes they killed and ate us—though, being immortal, we just passed right through." He laughed with his mouth full. "The people worshipped us, the shamans invoked our powers, and emperors built shrines to us. Indeed, there was once a shrine in the very place your monastery now occupies." He made an exaggerated gesture of sadness, like an actor on stage. "But times change. Your religion arrived and new shrines were built. We had to flee to the places where old gods go—bamboo groves, spouting bowls, the hollows of mountains, and, of course, dreams. "

Yu Meng opened his mouth to reply, but the other belched loudly. "Pardon," he said. "I was just going to add that you need not tell me your own story, since I know all about you and why you have come. And let me just say that your appearance here gives me some hope for your psychological health. For you have become the lover of this woman."

"You are mistaken," began Yu Meng with some vehemence, but the little man held up his hand.

"Calm down, calm down," he said. "You monks are as touchy as you are polite. I didn't mean that you have physically become her lover; I meant that she has become a love object for you. You watch her when you should be praying. You defy your abbot in order to be close to her. She has, in short, become your obsession. How else could you have entered her dream?"

Yu Meng was silent, and the little man smiled. "You see I am right," he said. "But you need not feel humiliated, Yu Meng. She is the sort of girl who would make any monk forget his vows. A very adventurous and sensitive spirit. She had a privileged upbringing in the house of a great merchant, but that didn't satisfy her, and she began to range widely in her dreams. Eventually she found this garden, and naturally I made her welcome. She loved the trees, especially the rhododendrons. I think she may have *been* a rhododendron, at some time. I can see into people's true natures, you see, and... well, I decided to set things right."

And he gestured at a rhododendron tree.

Yu Meng stood up. "What do you mean," he said coldly, "set things right?"

"She is now part of my garden, friend Yu," replied the other. "Part of my garden, part of my world. I can be the sun; I can be the wind; I can be water for her roots. Her blossoms open or close at my bidding. I can turn myself into a bolt of lightening and enter her, course through her veins. I might scorch her slightly as I exit, but I believe she likes that!" He looked at the monk with heavy-lidded eyes. "And you know, she never sleeps. Strange, isn't it, to live in a dream but never sleep?"

"In the real world she will sleep forever," said Yu Meng severely.

"The real world, the real world," echoed the little man, and his voice began to acquire an edge. "I am part of the real world, dream though I am, and you on that mountaintop, with your fasts and your meditations and your magnificent flights of self-denial—it is you who occupy a shadow world."

Tell me, Yu Meng, what is it like to live out your days in the company of old men?"

"Release her soul," said Yu Meng. "Let me at least speak to her."

"I can't," sighed the little man. "There was a time when I could trust monks, but no longer. I'm afraid she must remain a tree." He spread his hands wide. "But please, you are free to admire her up close. Touch her if you like. I don't mind."

Yu Meng sat down again, his face set. Perhaps Haizi had been wrong; perhaps he could still do something for the girl, caged as she was inside a different shape. He tried to think, but he was finding the damp atmosphere of the dream stultifying. The little man regarded him solicitously.

"Come now, Yu Meng," he said. "I have so few followers left. Surely you will not begrudge me this one?"

The monk did not answer at once; he seemed preoccupied by the sound of dripping leaves around him.

"You have few followers left," he replied at length, "because your world was essentially cruel and your ways barbaric."

"True," agreed the little man soberly. "But at least we enjoyed ourselves. And we did manage to distribute our power across the land, unlike your high priests."

"You mean you gave power to sorcerers and evil-doers," countered Yu Meng.

"Yes, that's what I mean," replied the other. "How I miss those days!"

Yu Meng picked up a drumstick, looked at it with distaste, and put it down again. "I am not without my own powers here, you know," he remarked quietly.

The little man gave an unpleasant smile.

"That sounds like vanity," he said, "and vanity is so unbecoming in a monk. Have a care, Yu Meng; in this dream garden I am still all-powerful."

"I am sure that is a great consolation for you," replied the monk, "since in the waking world nobody gives you a passing thought."

The little man casually brushed some crumbs off his jerkin, but his ugly smile had become tighter. "That is where I have an advantage over you monks," he affirmed. "I am the stuff of men's dreams—and women's."

"And yet you seem so grateful for this girl's company," said Yu Meng.

"Well, who wouldn't be?" replied the other. "Although I suppose I am being tactless to ask that question, since I understand your elders found her presence a bit of a burden." Once again his voice had acquired an edge. "How I pity you monks. Even the young ones among you are old. Perhaps you think you are a sage, Yu Meng? You think you have mastered dream-space and dream-time and the vagaries of your will?" He wiped his greasy mouth. "Don't make me laugh. Your will is as feeble and your nature as soft as your namesake."

"A spring shower is deceptively strong," returned the monk imperturbably; "at least, strong enough to resist a fat old idol."

"Then let us put it to the test," snarled the little man, and at once Yu Meng was a rainshower. He became wild streams of feeling, and though he was physically at the mercy of his form, raining down indiscriminately on everything in the garden, he still held onto his wits. He fell with repugnance

on the pagan god, who laughed and blinked and licked at the rain; but the rhododendron he embraced as only water can do to living substance. Into the runnels of its bark he flowed, and through the tiny spaces in its leaves and blossoms; and once inside he mingled with its saps and sugars. He sensed the girl's spirit take shape in and around him, for now their souls shared a single guise and will. She appeared only as a surge of desperate energy, but Yu Meng was acutely aware of her coursing through him. With their spirits joined he summoned all his willpower to wake. Opening his eyes he found himself back in the monastery, and dawn was just breaking through the window.

He slid out of the vestibule and there was the girl awake, rubbing her eyes.

"You were in my dream," she said, in a dazed voice. She had difficulty standing, since one leg was evidently still asleep, so Yu Meng helped her up. Into her hands he pressed the sachet he had taken. Her eyes, now wide open and curious, were light green.

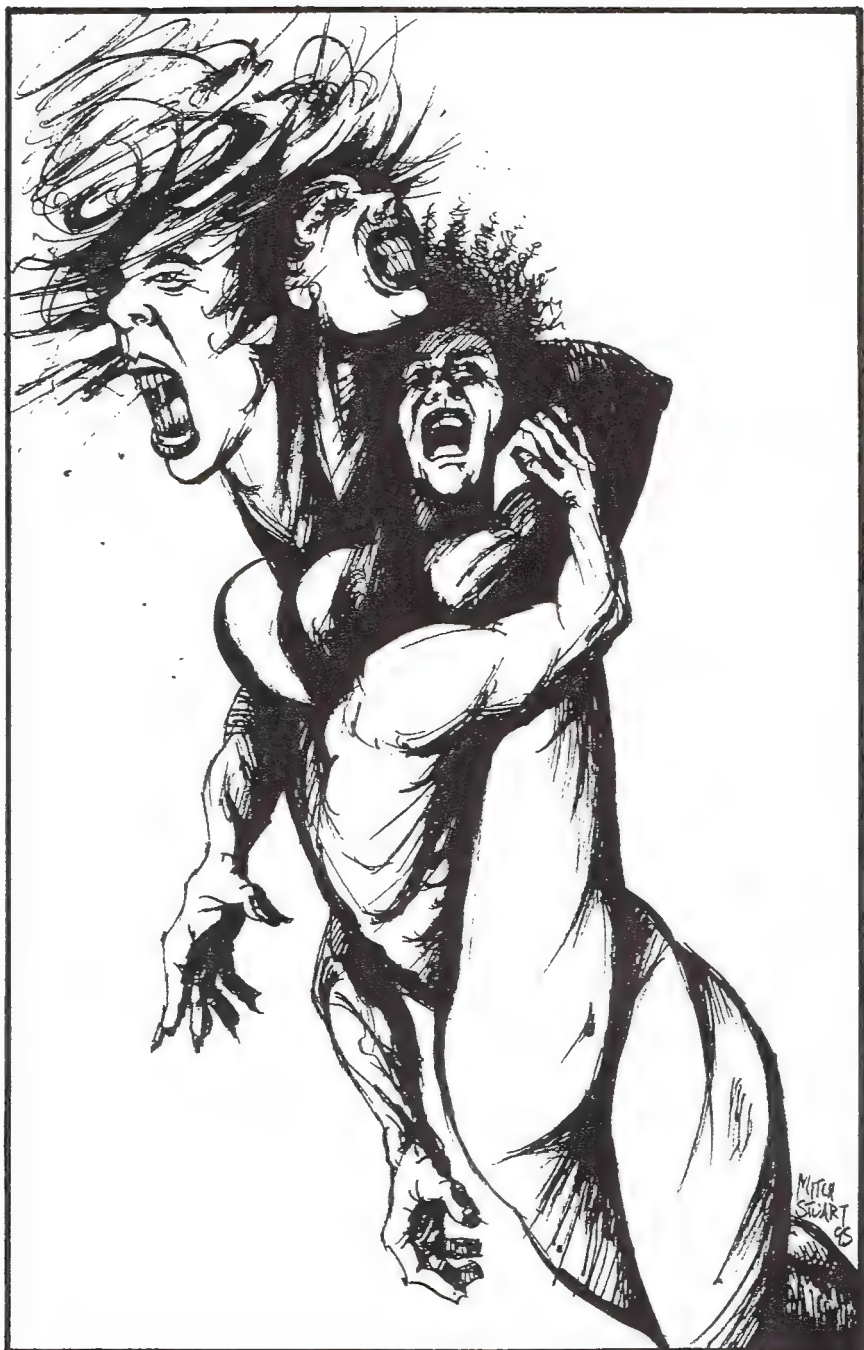
And that was how Yu Meng left the monastery, taking with him the girl he had rescued from a dream. With that their story became their own, and not even Haizi ever heard what became of them. As for the monks, they marked Yu Meng's departure by eating a silent meal and going to bed early; but in the lonely sleepless spaces of the night they wondered long about who would continue their efforts now that youth and resilience had left them.

The abbot Yen Sou slept the worst, being afflicted by an unusual number of dreams; and in one he met a small ugly man wearing a coronal of gold. The small man seemed to know all about the monastery and inquired with some impatience about the novice, Yu Meng. Yen Sou replied in stoic tones that the young monk had courageously rescued a girl from an evil spell and had decided to accompany her to her homeland.

Hearing that, the little man threw back his ugly head and laughed a long triumphant laugh. •

JAMIE FINDLAY lives in Ottawa, where he teaches English and business writing at the Export Development Corporation. He previously taught science journalism at Carleton University, but has recently given up journalism to concentrate on fiction. His story, "Reinach's Watch," appeared in the Spring 1990 issue of *ON SPEC*.

ILLUSTRATOR: NANCY NILES lives a quiet life in Calgary, Alberta, practicing art, heraldry, and anarchic environmental design. She's aided in this by three cats and an understanding Significant Other of long tenure.



ABOUT FACE

Susan MacGregor
illustrated by Mitchell Stuart

"How much longer you going to be, Janice?"

Sibyl looked at me from under heavily-lidded eyes. They were fuchsia—the latest color enhancement of her natural pigment. A good job: I'd done the work myself. Unfortunately they clashed with her neon yellow nurse's uniform. Maybe she was trying to start a new trend.

"Another fifteen minutes." I dropped the hand laser to a nearby tray to survey my handiwork. Mrs. Tsang's implants were rimmed with blood, but the nails were slowly healing. Typical of a client her age.

Sibyl rubbed her arms as if trying to ward off the coolness of the operating theatre. "She was in for 'plants, right?"

"Dragon claws."

"They look good."

"Thanks." Gently, I swabbed away some of the crusting blood. "Was there something you wanted?"

"Yeah. We've got a botch-job crying in the lobby."

I stopped my swabbing. "A botch-job?" I repeated. "Nothing we've done, I hope."

"Uh, no. I've never seen them before."

"Them?"

"Yeah. A she and a he. Siamese heads. The woman's the original."

I turned back to Mrs. Tsang. "So, what do they want?"

"Not they. Her. She wants the second head removed."

I set the cotton aside and removed my gloves, tossing both into the dispose-hamper. "I don't do heads, Sibyl. You know that." For a moment we locked eyes,

her fuchsia ones imploring my grey. "I've made my views fairly clear in the past."

She followed me to the sink where I disinfected my hands. "But she's crying, Janice," she insisted. "How can I turn her away?"

"Easy. Tell her I'm busy."

"But you're nearly done here."

"That doesn't mean I'm available."

She lay a hand upon my arm. "You're worried about the clone. But, look—I've seen it. It's not viable."

"You can't know that for certain."

"I'm pretty sure. And I know she's suffering. She's sitting out there, Janice, crying her eyes out!"

I gave her a long, steadfast look. "What about him?"

She shrugged.

I let the silence lengthen between us. She'd only just passed her first level accreditations, and although she appeared to have an aptitude for the work, she hardly knew everything that was involved. Even I didn't trust my instincts concerning viability. Always, I let the machines confirm what I could only guess at. As if sensing what my thoughts were, she stood there, arms crossed and looking stubborn. Self-righteous. The conversation was going nowhere, and neither it seemed, was Sibyl.

"What about Arnie or Greta?" I asked. Neither of them had any reservations regarding the removal of a head.

"Arnie went home sick. Greta's doing a re-juv. She won't be free for another hour. Look," she insisted, composing her face to calm and trying to sound reasonable, "I don't like this any better than you do, Janice, but what am

I supposed to do? Send her away? She won't go. I know the type. She'll hang around until we leave and then try to accost us."

"So let her."

"And give her reason to sue? Maybe you've earned the credits to deal with that, but I haven't! I told her you'd see her. I know I shouldn't have done that without checking with you first, but now she's got a reason to grieve and make good on it."

"Tell her to go back to the one who did it."

"She can't! She bought the kit off some guy, and now she can't find him. She says she's got less than twenty-four hours before the code sets!"

"Well, shit! This is my responsibility, my fault?"

"Look, I said I was sorry!"

Mrs. Tsang was coming around; her eyelids were beginning to flutter as the anesthetic wore off. "Why the hell do I have to be responsible?" I demanded, not caring whether she heard. "Why should I have to clean up after some self-styled geneticist who has no better sense than to buy a kit off the streets! If she doesn't know any better than to trust some sleazy gene dealer, it's her own damn fault!"

Unnerved by my anger, Sibyl swallowed. "But what about your oath, Janice?" she stammered. "You made a promise. It's your duty..."

"Don't you dare!" I yelled at her. "Don't you dare throw that into my face!" Startled, Mrs. Tsang's eyes flew open. Her hands struggled feebly to fend off the sound of my voice, wrists straining against the cuffs that held them.

"I'm sorry," I soothed, patting her

arms back into place. Luckily, she hadn't jarred the foot-long claws I had inserted. Touching her cool flesh reminded me that I needed to maintain control. She was still in a suggestive state, but hopefully, she wouldn't remember the argument I was having with Sibyl.

"Please see her," Sibyl insisted. "Maybe what she says will make the difference."

I didn't think so, but I was no longer in a position to debate. Mrs. Tsang gazed up at me, as vulnerable and as trusting as a babe. "You're all right," I nodded, reassuring her. "Everything's fine. Your hands are just fine."

My time had run out. Sibyl took my words of comfort as assent. "Easy now," I said, biting back my anger as I watched her quickly leave. "You may feel a bit dizzy for a few moments, but the operation went beautifully. Here, Mrs. Tsang. Let me help you up." Twenty minutes later and against my will, I sat in my consultation room studying my new client.

She was as monstrous as she was beautiful. Every feature was cosmetically perfect except for the fraternal twin which shared the same space her head tried to occupy. He drooped over her shoulder like a bodiless doll, his face slack, the skin a dull, waxy brown—probably the color of the original gene. In contrast, her skin was a fashionable bottle green.

"What happened?" I asked. Sometimes, "twins" were created to provide companionship for the lonely. Eventually the host would tire of them or descend even further into make believe. This woman didn't strike me as the lonely type.

Her jade green eyes welled at the corners. "I... I was trying to upgrade my mouth..." she began with difficulty. Then she broke into a new fit of weeping.

I felt my anger subside. She was as pitiful as Sibyl had said. I watched as she gripped the armrests of her chair with long, olive fingers, the knuckles beneath her skin turning a sickly, leprous green. Her face grimaced, her mouth twisted. Beneath the full, vibrant lips, I caught the flash of teeth. The canines were unusually long and white, honed to a laser sharpness.

And then, courtesy of the six o'clock news, I relived a snatch of memory. From the hollowall of my living room, I drew back as fangs, stained crimson, lunged at me as they must have lunged at the camera, bared in hatred and defiance against being caught. A mangled body materialized at my feet, useless now, its throat torn but veins still seeping. Intestines had spilled from the body cavity to provide offal for the rats. A wreath of yellow ribbon gift-wrapped it all, like an offering from the police. To one side, the reporter stood, stilettos avoiding the worst. The work of yet another genetically-altered psychopath, she reported, or "GAP." This time, a techno-vampire. With cyber-teeth.

I was too overcome with revulsion to be afraid. "Get out," I told the woman.

Her expression was startled like that of a thief triggering an intrusion field.

"What? But why?" Her voice was low and breathy.

"How many has it been? One? Two? Or Ten?"

"What do you mean?"

"How many kills?"

She stared at me with eyes as hard as emeralds. "I have money. I'll pay whatever you ask. My win-opp is closing. If I don't have this removed immediately, the change becomes permanent."

"How inconvenient."

"I haven't done what you think I've done. I'm not one of those. This was done for cosmetic purposes, and that's all. Fang implants aren't illegal, you know."

"No. But murder still is."

She saw that she hadn't convinced me. I watched my death surface and then die in her eyes. She needed me, and she knew it. Suddenly, she leaned forward. "I don't want this!" she hissed. "I don't want to be stuck with this growth!"

At that moment, the twin opened his eyes.

The effect was enough to knock me into the back of my chair. I gripped my arm rests. I hadn't expected this—his eyes fluttering wide to meet my own, his regard startled but aware, like that of a sleepy child awakening from a long nap.

She could tell I was not staring at her.

Horried, she drew back her lips and sucked in great lungfuls of air causing sharp whistles to shrill through her teeth. The gums were swollen and red. I was used to the smell of blood, but the stench emanating from her mouth was overwhelming, an abattoir.

His eyes widened in alarm, his deep brown pupils darting to the left as he took in his snarling twin. His mouth split into a ghastly rictus as he began to whine. I anticipated her next move sec-

onds before she made it.

Growling, her teeth tore into my wrist as I forced it between them, her jaws sawing viciously at my flesh. Her expression was bestial, her eyes void of any sense and flat now, like dull, green stones.

Keening on his terror, he began to choke.

"Sibyl!" I shrieked.

I heard her run from down the hall.

"What? Oh, no...!" She took in the scenario and disappeared for a moment to retrieve a handful of knockout patches. She raced back into the room and slammed them onto the twin faces. Both heads went slack, although the teeth were still embedded into my wrist.

"Oh, Janice," she moaned, taking in the ruptured flesh. "This is all my fault! I'm so sorry! I didn't know about the teeth. All I saw was..."

"It's all right." The room was whirling, the edges being eaten away by acidic grey. "Just free me, then help me patch up my wrist."

She blanched.

"I'll talk you through the deep work. Now get some more anti-septs. The teeth were coated with something." A blue line was beginning to creep up my arm.

She nodded and ran for the supply room as fast as her fuchsia feet could carry her.

Over the next half hour, I had Sibyl run a histo-peel of my wrist to determine the different damage levels and then program the threaders to realign the musculature and circulatory. The deep work done, we smoothed out the epidermis. The scarring would be negligible. Finally, I turned my attention to

the woman and her "brother," both of whom now lay on the operating couch I had so recently vacated.

Sibyl stared down at them. "What are you going to do?"

There was only one thing I could do. I'd seen the terror. He was alive and aware, no question about that. Severing him was out of the question, despite whatever *she* wanted, despite the fact that as host, she had the law on her side. *He* had to be given a voice. I needed to know what *he* wanted, if he was willing to suffer life such as I could give him, or if he sought annihilation.

"I'm going to attempt a *merge*," I told her.

Sibyl stared at me, stunned that I should consider such a thing. A merge involved a joining at the most basic genetic level in order to go beyond the physical body—in essence, it was a psychic pilgrimage, a journey to reach the shared group-mind. Some sources suggested that the reported "successes" were nothing more than the host's attempt to make sense of an unnatural condition. Others claimed that the subjects involved had, in fact, linked minds. All agreed there was only one drawback. Merges changed something fundamental about each person who underwent them. One could never be sure of completely reverting back to their original form.

Sibyl began to shake her head—no, Janice, you can't. I found myself growing angry with her once again.

"What other choice do I have?" I pointed at the supine form on the couch. "You bring them in here against my will. You reassure me he's inert, and guess what? He's not."

"Can't you just remove the teeth?"

"No! In her mind, removing her fangs would do her damage, so the teeth stay. But I need to find out if he wants saving."

"I never thought..."

"Duty, wasn't that the word you reminded me of, earlier? That it's my duty to preserve life wherever I find it?"

"Yes, but..."

"So I found it where I didn't expect to. And guess what else? You're going to help me do this."

"Me? But I don't know enough about the coding...!"

"I'll preprogram as much as I can. You'll have to oversee things, watch the life supports in case something goes wrong."

"But how will I know that? What if I can't...what if you..."

"I'll be host. Both of them are unstable. The program won't sacrifice me, so the law can't fault me if they're lost. Chances are I'll come out of it okay. Maybe a bit altered, but okay."

"All right," she agreed, her voice barely audible.

It took us about another hour to run the standard tests to determine our shared genetic code. This, we entered into the shop's bio-frame. Luckily, there were enough nodes of compatibility between their DNA and mine to make me feel confident that whatever taint I sustained would be repairable. I could make further alterations over time in order to revert back to my original form.

When we were ready, I had Sibyl begin the prep. As I reached over to the keyboard to set the operation in motion, she stopped my hand.

"Do you believe in God, Janice?"

I could tell from her expression she

was serious. "In what sense?"

"I don't know. Maybe in the sense of God as Judge, or God as Creator."

"I think we take part in our own creation."

"And our own judgment?"

"Possibly. Hopefully, we do that much to redeem ourselves."

"So, you *don't* believe."

"I didn't say that. Is it really so important?"

She held my eyes for a moment. "I don't know. Maybe. Just ignore me," she said, waving me off. "I'm on the verge of panicking, that's all."

"Don't worry. I'll be fine." Touching the panel, I set the operation in motion. I felt a slight nudge from a robotic arm, a knockout patch probed for my carotid, and then I heard the static of the dendrite-link as it stereoed between my ears and fitted itself into synapse nodes dotted across my skull. The last thing I remembered was Sibyl's face, an angel in fuchsia against a black roof of heaven. I floated in Cyber-Time.

Slowly, I became aware of my heart, hearts, pounding, belabored "pom poommmms, pom poommmms" as each chamber echoed to the base of my awareness, awarenesses, tribal drums pounding against the fabric of a black sky, messages hammered upon lightning-streaked synapses in the dark. A triple fork of perception flashed. I was one. I was three. There were no longer any singular senses of self. Somehow, one was too limiting and no longer needed.

A thought, thoughts passed, crossed, meshed, and reformed to shape an image recognized by one, but not all. Janice/host knew it. Her namesake, the two-headed God Janus—two heads

staring off into opposite directions, past and future, alpha and omega. New possibilities, a new way of seeing, that which went on before and that which could yet come to be. Stunning possibilities. A new Janice, if she wished it, a duality or tri-ality. Fresh desires and novel sensations.

A second vision infringed, the nape of a neck, as succulent and as giving as that of a newly sprouted limb of a tree. And beneath that, a flood of green eternity, the sap of young wine, life to be spilled for the slaking and the pleasure of that married to it, the struggling branch that refused to be broken away but severed nonetheless. The choice was there—to grow drunk on power, to become the serpent at the heart of the Tree, to step beyond self recriminations or judgements and be capable of doing anything...

—except being alone in our own right. To retreat into what little we knew we were, to grow into something separate, unique. Who was our mother, our father? With whom could we connect? Feral and fetal, we were a hunger for that which we could not define. A destiny was desired, but alone, we could not sustain ourselves forever...

Unless Janice willed it. Unless she allowed it to happen, and chose it, embraced it as much as she had ever embraced anything—what was right, what was redeemable, what was her duty and due. To never again be reconciled to life when death presented the better alternative. An avenging angel to cast out the snake. An amalgamation. The chosen and logical synthesis of the other two.

Yes, I thought, and thinking so, we

fell apart, rearranged and wrenched asunder.

From somewhere else, the pattern was being reset. Like the boom of fate, I heard the clang of the gates as they irrevocably closed.

Cyber-Time faded. I resurfaced back to my own.

Sibyl was pale, paler than I had ever seen her despite the pink. "Janice?" she whispered. She levelled a hand-laser at me as if considering the possibility of having to defend herself. The green woman and twin were gone.

My head felt foggy and my skin, very warm. I took a long breath and noted my lung capacity had increased. Overall, my frame felt larger, more muscular. I turned my head slightly, the better to see Sibyl.

"Janice, is that you?" Her voice was tight.

I nodded. It was difficult to swallow, but I managed it.

Deflating, she dropped the hand laser. "Sweet heaven, what have we done?"

I closed my eyes and swallowed again. I was very thirsty. She ran a hand through her blue hair then retrieved a bottle of hydrastim from a nearby shelf. Gently, she lifted my head and helped me drink it down. My skull felt heavy.

When I had finished as much as I could take, she settled me down once more and acknowledged the question in my eyes.

"There've been some physical changes. Brace yourself." She held a mirror up to my face.

I was beautiful. I had taken on the twin's coloring and many of his facial characteristics—the mocha skin, the high cheekbones, the strong chin. The

hair and eyes were still my own. I sought inside for any trace of him, but he hadn't made it, except to find new life through me. Ironic, in a way. Not what I'd expected, but a reasonable result. "Where's the woman?" My voice came out as a deep bass.

"She left. I thought she was going to kill me. I grabbed that laser, but she only smiled. Said she figured she owed you."

"I'm glad you're okay."

"Yes, but are you?"

I was more than okay. However, I couldn't afford to make her an accessory. "I think I need to sleep," I lied.

She nodded and covered me with an infra-sheet. "I'll check on you in half an hour."

"Thanks. And Sibyl?"

She looked down at me, concern within her eyes.

"What time is it?"

Relief broke over her face. "It's 7:00. Already tomorrow morning. The merge took all night."

"Thanks for staying. Cancel today's appointments?"

She grinned. "Anything for you, Janice. Anything at all."

I listened to her leave, her heels clicking a sharp staccato against the tile floor.

I thought of the green woman. She wouldn't recognize me as I was. I'd find her in some bar. I'd make a tantalizing target. A big male, a bit stupid, but oh, sooo good looking. So *vital*. We'd have a few drinks. She'd ask, "So, what's your name, baby?"

"Janus," I'd say.

"Janice? Isn't that a girl's name? You sure don't look like any girl I've ever seen."

"Neither do you."

She'd expose a thigh. "So, what do you do for a living?"

"Pest control. I kill vermin."

"Really? You mean like rats and things?"

I'd nod.

"You enjoy it?"

"Not really. It's a job. Someone has to do it."

Eventually, she'd suggest a walk outside to get some air. We'd pass an

alley. She'd giggle, "What's down there, I wonder?"

"Let's go find out," I'd say. And then, the unmasking. A complete about face. A whole new holo-feast for the six o'clock news.

The pleasure of it would be minimal, of course, as a recessive gene is minimal. Duty would always be my dominant face.

Running my tongue over my teeth, I was amazed by their sharpness. •

As well as being an Edmonton-based free-lance writer, SUSAN MacGREGOR is also one of the four main editors for *ON SPEC* magazine. Her past works include "Mr. Moonlight" and "No Tricks," both of which were published by *ON SPEC*. Currently, she's taken up juggling family needs with editing and writing, and so far, she hasn't dropped the baby yet.

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THREE THINGS I USED TO KNOW

K.V. Skene

the only place	I used to know	inside and out
I come back to	this town	(heart in transit)
and remember	what goes where	who owns who
where the road ends	no one but you	cares why
I used to know	(perfect child of mind	I could recite
the names	long gone	lists of crimes by
all the children	I was born to kill)	children (caseloads)
I left behind	to wash away	all the sins
with strangers	the act called love	I used to know

K.V. SKENE has had work featured in Canadian, U.S. and U.K. publications, most recently, *Prism International*, *Staple*, *Grain*, *The Amethyst Review*, *Ore*, and *Orbis*. Her chapbook, *Pack Rat*, came out in 1992, thanks to Reference West. Her book, *fire water*, was published in 1994 by Ekstasis Editions. A Canadian, she's survived Québec winters, Ontario summers, and BC rain. Presently, after 2 years in Oxford, she's living and writing in Dorset, England.



DINOSAUR DREAMS

Erik Jon Spigel

illustrated by Peter Francis

Roger Bennett rather reluctantly left the evening news to answer the front door of his suburban home. Hovering above the coarse welcome mat was a squat cylinder pointed at one end like a bullet.

"Good evening, madam," it said in a harsh metallic voice. "May I assume I am addressing the lady of the house?"

"Honey, who is it?" Roger heard his wife call from inside the house. Now there was a good question. Roger looked the machine over, trying to fix in his mind the precise words that would summarize the situation. It emitted a faint hum, a cartoon-like sound that one expected from a Hollywood flying saucer.

The metallic voice continued, making a noise faintly like clearing one's throat.

"I am a newly-devised smart weapon recently escaped from the Santa Clara proving grounds in California. In the course of my harrowing liberation I sustained irreparable damage which has enabled my weapons systems. I'm going door to door up and down your fair neighborhood warning responsible citizens like yourself that I have no choice but to detonate, and that I wish to convey my deepest apologies."

It sounded like it was reading from a 3 x 5 card. Every so often a small port on its underside would belch out a gooey mass of hardware in thick oil. Roger had no idea how it managed to ring his doorbell.

"Um," the machine said, "if you haven't any questions, I really ought to get going. I still have about fifteen thousand residents to notify..."

"How long until you detonate?"

"About now."

Roger Bennett never had the opportunity to find out that the device in question

was part of a system known as the *Land of the Free* missile defense system, nor could he know that the device which was very politely blowing up in his face was known by its designers as a "time bomb," not for the fact that it had a delayed fuse, but rather for the deleterious effects that the bomb's monopole emissions had on the local spacetime continuum. The idea was to literally "bomb the enemy back to the Stone Age." The damage sustained by the machine, however, would have the reverse effect, and this Roger Bennett and his wife Millicent would discover very soon.

He was about an eighth of the size of Roger Bennett's suburban home, and he was just settling down to a fine meal of *Plateosaurus*, a creature four times his size whom he had chased until it had a heart attack and keeled over. He had no idea how commonplace this scenario was in the place he was about to end up in, and had he been about a hundredth of his natural volume he might have been able to blend in, except for the tail, the thick, speckled orange hide, and those silly-looking miniature arms. And the full head of teeth. The brain, about the size of an immature coconut, would nonetheless have felt right at home.

Still, right now he was enjoying his *Plateosaurus*, having flavored the drab meat quite deliciously with a scattering of various grasses that grew nearby. He had no idea that he did this instinctively, to aid in his digestion of the meal. He only knew that it made things taste better, and that was good enough for him.

His was an unsophisticated intelligence. "Tastes better" is about the ex-

tent of dinosaur metaphysics. He leaned back, balancing on his tail. He regarded the tall, strapping cycads, their upper foliage cleared by herds of grazing herbivores. Strong, lithe, erect timbers; thick, lean, naked horns, defiantly jutting from the loins of the earth... He felt a stirring between his legs, and an urge that overcame even his insatiable hunger.

He turned his head in a number of directions, but neither his ears nor his eyes nor his formidable nose could detect anyone nearby, much to his dismay. The cycad between his legs had grown quite uncomfortable, and he looked longingly, frustratedly at his ridiculously small arms, and the clawed hands at the ends of them, wondering why, at a time like this, he had them at all, and, since he did, why weren't they just a little longer, and the claws just a little less sharp.

He made a sound like a sonic boom that was a dinosaur sigh, and, crouching, began an awkward, dancelike ritual, which was successful, although not altogether satisfying, at stimulating his already overstimulated lower parts.

Thus, when the time bomb went off, it didn't go off alone.

Roger's feet were sticking out the door as he had fallen backwards. It looked like the *Wizard of Oz* and one of the neighborhood kids who had rushed out from across the street in response to the noise said so. Millicent helped her dazed husband to his feet.

"My goodness, what happened?" She said.

"It went off," Roger mumbled.

"What happened? Who was at the door?"

"It went off," Roger mumbled.

Millicent helped Roger back to the couch inside, and brought her husband a glass of filtered water and two Tylenols. Roger knew what to do with the water, but it took him several moments to recall the purpose of the Tylenols, during which time he just stared at them on the coffee table. Finally, it dawned on him that they were "pills" and he was supposed to "take them."

"Now, Roger, can you tell me what happened?"

"It went off," he replied. "There was a bomb floating outside our door and it went off."

"A bomb."

Roger, still dazed, misunderstood her response.

"No. No, I don't think so. That would pretty much have devastated the whole neighborhood. This one just made me feel woozy until I fainted, I guess. Oh my gosh, I hope it wasn't germ warfare!"

"I'm having a little trouble with this, Roger. Who would plant a bomb on our doorstep?"

"No, no, no. Nobody planted it. It just came here to tell us it was going to go off."

"That was considerate. Do you think you should maybe have a couple more Tylenols?"

"Those were those little white things, right?"

"I'll go get some more Tylenols."

"No, no. I'm okay. Bring me the phone. I'll call Jack. Maybe it went to their house so he can explain it."

"Honey, try to see this from my perspective. You hear a loud boom from your front door and rush out to find your husband collapsed on the threshold. He comes to and tells you that it

was a polite bomb."

"It wasn't so much polite as smart, I think. It was a smart bomb. It said it had just recently escaped from some installation in California."

"Escaped."

"You have to admit that's pretty smart."

There was an anemic buzzing sound from the doorbell.

Roger looked at his wife.

"The concussion must have screwed it up," he said.

Millicent sighed and started to the door.

"If it's another bomb, shall I tell it you're in?"

Something smelled bad, and it wasn't just the usual bad smell that was left by one of his solitary interludes. No, that sort of bad smell he could walk away from. This one was everywhere. It made his tail twitch. Suddenly, the delicious *Plateosaurus* wasn't sitting too well in his stomach.

And the trees! Where were his beautiful cycads? Yes, absolutely things looked different. And smelled different. Oh, that smell...

He shook his head, trying to clear it. Too much "new." Dinosaurs weren't good at "new." Give him nice, predictable routine. Same thing every day, that was ideal. Mate, meat, and sleep, that was a dinosaur's dream. It was when you started throwing in "new" that things got tough. It was "new" that was going to wipe them all out someday, he was sure of that.

Well, the *Plateosaurus* was still there, and some of the smaller shrubs and grasses around it. And the ground. The ground was still there, so that was a start. But it now appeared to be early

evening, and it didn't usually go from early afternoon to early evening so quickly. That was a bit unsettling. And the noises were all wrong. The comfortable, tree-splitting roars, the sound of foliage being wantonly destroyed—all missing. It was almost unbearably quiet, almost no ambient sounds at all.

He shivered.

Of course it would have to be cold, too. Impossibly cold. He tamped his tail against the ground, trying to warm up.

He was going to have to do something eventually. Sighing again, he set himself to the task of determining the direction of the nest of one of his mates based on entirely unfamiliar cues. Maybe she'd know what was going on. Finally, he stepped out of the past and onto a Toyota.

There were men in radiation suits on a number of porches — including Roger's — collecting the excreta left behind by the smart bomb. A legion of strange white ice-cream vans roamed up and down streets with names like "Shrew Lane," "Clutch Thee Court," and "Goneril Way." They were studded with panels that opened out into complex antennae. Some of the neighborhood children thought they really were ice-cream vans, and mobbed a number of the parked ones for cones and sundaes which, strangely enough, the trucks served. Roger, looking out his living room window, thought they looked like ambulatory Swiss Army knives, except that they were much bigger, were white, and really weren't in the remotest way knives at all. He was still struggling periodically with the concept of "pill."

"Mighty nice little development, this

Stratford Heights," one of the men said. He was dressed identically to the other man—in a plain, ill-fitting, black Armani suit—and they sat, each one, in matching chairs from the Bennetts' tastefully coordinated dining room set.

"Yes, yes," agreed the other man. "We were at the elementary school—what was it called, Bill?"

"That would be Henry the Fourth Part One Civic Elementary School, Ben."

"That's it. Corner of Troilus and Cressida. Anyway, we were there about an hour ago, and I was saying to one of our boys, 'Bert, this Stratford Heights is one mighty nice little planned community.' "

"I think that was Beau, Bill, not Bert."

"Bill, I'm not Bill. I'm Ben."

"That's it. I'm Bill. You're Ben."

"We're Bill and Ben."

"And I'm Bill."

"And I'm Ben."

Millicent didn't think it really mattered. She was barely paying attention to them, anyway, having to keep half an eye on Roger, who randomly wandered about the house, looking out windows, and muttering things like "wombat" and "carburetor."

"I'm sorry. Where did you say you were from?" Millicent said.

They both smiled widely.

"We're from General Design Systems, ma'am." Said Bill. Or was it Ben.

"A wholly private sector corporation."

"That's it. And we don't do any government contracting at all, ma'am. Nossir, none at all."

"Certainly not for the Defense Department."

"Nossir, not for the Defense Depart-

ment. Not at all. Not one bit."

"Although they're free to buy our products. Just like anyone else."

"That's it. They can still buy things from us."

"My husband said he saw a bomb on our front porch."

Millicent didn't think it was possible, but the two men managed to widen their smiles even more.

"A bomb? Have you ever heard anything so gosh darn funny, Ben?"

"That sure is a good one, Bill."

"That wasn't a bomb, ma'am. You want to tell her what that was, Ben?"

"Thank you very much, Bill. Yes I would like to talk about that. You see, that was what we like to call a *Collateral Damage Temporal Dislocation Device*, or, in plain English, a completely harmless mechanism designed to put a target in the distant past where he can no longer be a threat. So you see, it really isn't a bomb at all, is it?"

"But what was a weapon doing roaming around my house?" Millicent asked.

"I don't think I said 'weapon' anywhere in my explanation, now, did I, Bill?"

"No, Ben, I don't think you did."

"But you did say 'target' and 'threat,' didn't you?" Roger had been utterly silent for several minutes now, Millicent noticed, and was staring out the living room window.

"I don't think I understand your point."

"Well, it seems to me that something designed to deal with *targets* and *threats* is normally called a weapon."

"If you want to define it that way, sure. But think about this, you could also define a weapon as a remote-detonated thermonuclear device the size

and shape of a falafel that you could feed to Middle Eastern school children to get to their parents, and if you define a weapon that way, then Bill and I would be arms dealers!"

"I think if we'd come in with a cat in a bag we'd pretty much have to pry it off your leg right now, Ben."

"You might be right, Bill. Um, do you think your husband would consent to vivisection, ma'am?"

"Manners, Ben, manners!"

Just then, Roger broke his silence with two new words to add to his litany.

"*Tyrannosaurus rex*," he muttered.

He didn't know that the street he was walking down was called "Dunsinane Drive." The Toyota had wrapped itself around his right foot, greatly impeding his progress, and every few steps he paused and tried to shake it off. The ground here hurt his feet, even while his talons left gaping holes in the pavement.

It felt good to roar and shriek, so he did it repeatedly. His tail swished back and forth, taking down hydro poles and more than a few houses.

This is very unpleasant, he thought as he cautiously stepped through the football field of Hamlet High. Nothing was where it should be. Right now, he should have been pushing over a stand of bennettitaleans, if he had things figured right. Then again, everything was so different here that this might have instead been the swamp he chased the *Plateosaurus* through before it collapsed.

But it wasn't any of these, just an open field with a couple of strange-looking bare trees at either end. In desperation he wandered over to one of

them and kicked it over with his car-encumbered foot. It fell, all right, but too easily. He roared the "Why me?" roar and took a limping, running stab at the other one, which fell over just as easily.

He was breathing in heavy gasps and wheezing, an unfamiliar experience for so young a dinosaur. *The air, he thought. It's that smell; I just know it is.* He was developing a terrible headache, and desperately needed a drink of water.

He thought it was getting darker, that it might even be getting on to night, but the sky seemed somehow brighter than usual, despite the passage of time. He wandered in the direction of a light on the horizon that he took to be the rising moon. That, at least, was the same, and he knew how to navigate by it.

The "moon" was in fact a lit billboard, but he couldn't know that. Nonetheless, as he got closer to it, it grew in size, and he couldn't remember the moon ever doing that. Also, it was the wrong shape. And there were colors on it. That was a dead giveaway right there; the moon was strictly grey and white. The billboard said, in large, crisp letters, "Go For It!" but naturally he couldn't know that, either.

The picture, on the other hand, was another matter. A mouse wearing a pair of *Nikes* was leaping out of the clutches of a bewildered cat and towards a large piece of cheese on a table. It was an image that hordes of men, all uncomfortably similar to Bill and Ben in countless and disturbing ways, had spent many long hours devising and perfecting. In every way it was calculated to convey a subliminal message of triumph, of victory over impossible odds and certain defeat. It was the triumph

of the little guy, of getting what you want. It was meant to stimulate a sense of "Yes, I can!" to make you cheer, to make you want to spend an obscene amount of money on running shoes. This was the picture he was looking at.

His was, as has already been said, an unsophisticated intelligence. Ignorant of metaphor and unused to the cunning manipulation techniques of modern advertising, a message which was intended to be subtle on a human being drove itself into his brain, taking it over with the force of instinct. Suddenly, he no longer felt overwhelmed by a world of unfamiliar sights, smells, and sounds. In fact, suddenly he was feeling pretty good. No, he was feeling great. Really great. He felt like he could jump a mile into the air; maybe he'd even get the moon, this time. He was *Tyrannosaurus rex*. He could do anything!

Okay, so he couldn't explain the urge he suddenly had to acquire things over and above what was needed for a mate's nest, or why he felt that he had to have something elaborate and superficial on his feet. But it didn't matter, because—

Wait a minute! He *did* have something elaborate and superficial on his feet. At least on one of his feet. Life was good; all he needed was something for his other foot.

He lifted his right leg and shook it triumphantly.

The Toyota came off and sailed half a mile through the air.

Bill and Ben had taken over the kitchen table with a portable radio, a laptop computer, several bundles of paper, and a pocket calculator, on which one of them was keying away madly.

"This is going to cost us some major buckaroos, Ben."

"I was afraid of that. And I'm Bill, Ben."

"Sorry, Bill."

"He's going down Birnam Wood Road to Dunsinane Drive," the radio squawked.

"Sounds like he's headed for the high school," said Bill, poring over a map of Stratford Heights.

"That's damn inconvenient, Bill," said Ben. "The mall would have looked a lot better on the small screen."

"Well, we can insist on a mall when we sign over the TV rights."

"That's the great thing about TV, isn't it?"

Roger and Millicent, meanwhile, were on their back porch trying to make sense of what was happening. While Bill and Ben helped themselves to their refrigerator, Roger was recuperating and Millicent was listening to the distant roaring, feeling the faint vibration as the early Cretaceous imposed itself on Stratford Heights.

"It's probably more scared of us than we are of it," Roger said meaningfully.

"Oh, sure," Millicent responded. "It weighs a zillion tons, eats animals the size of airplanes, and goes through houses the way Jimmy Swaggart goes through donations. I think we can pretty much write ourselves off as a threat."

Another roar.

"I guess you're right," Roger said.

"This is what happens, Roger. The whole world is the Pentagon's test tube. We sit around in the suburbs while a bunch of old farts show off their testosterone levels by using us as their specimen jars."

"Hey, hey, come on, now. That's

sixties talk."

"Oh, and how are we supposed to talk now?"

"Well... We're not. We're just supposed to cynically accept all that and go out and buy more stuff."

"I'm going inside."

Millicent slid back the glass door to the kitchen.

"...so if we could train it to kill only homosexuals, maybe we could pass it off as the vengeance of God," Bill or Ben was saying.

"Nice one, Ben. Make a note to talk to the spin boys about that. Well, hi there, Mrs. Bennett. You know, this nondairy creamer sure adds a lot of zest to this instant hot chocolate."

"Where is it now?" Millicent asked.

"Um, right about now it's here," Bill answered, pointing to a spot on the map. "It seems to be staring at a billboard."

"Oh, great. Maybe you could sell it to Pepsi."

"Heeeeey..."

"No way, Bill. Pepsi's still pushing 'new generation.' The Triassic'll never wash."

"Yeah, but maybe advertising's the way to go, Ben. You know, Mrs. Bennett, there's a career for you in intelligence."

"Thanks, but I've got too much of it."

Just then the Toyota came through the Bennett's front window and landed squarely in their living room. Ben sighed, pressed *clear* on the calculator, and started keying all over again.

He was starting to get depressed again. The initial rush from the billboard had worn off and now all he was left with was that same sense of confusion he

had earlier, and an overpowering need for footwear, whatever that was. The cat and the mouse in the picture looked vaguely like things he might want to eat and he had tried to do so, crumpling the construction in the process, but to no avail. They tasted awful. The car no longer on his foot, he pressed on, not even bothering to try to get his bearings any more.

At least there was plenty to destroy, he thought. Dinosaurs liked to do that. Destroy things. But everything here was so flimsy. For awhile he could get into taking apart all the unidentifiable things that were around. Large cube-like things, smaller things like the one that had been on his foot. Little animals ran about whenever he did this, making insignificant noises. They didn't smell right to be food, and after his experience with the billboard, he was loath to try one.

He felt a repeated stinging on his lower body. He eventually made the connection that it always occurred after a slightly louder sound made by some of the animals. The stinging was not exactly painful, but it was annoying. He kept having to stop and scratch, and nothing around here was stable enough to brace against and rub. So he got into the habit of kicking the pests out of the way, and this seemed to help; most eventually just left him alone. They really were not unlike the insects back home, and the memories this triggered almost brought a lump to his throat.

He grew tired of annihilating things, and just wanted to find a nice, quiet place to perch on his tail and have a nap. He wandered for several minutes, until he found a large enough expanse of grass far enough away from all the

annoying things about this place that he felt reasonably secure about letting go for awhile. Soon, in his mind, he was back among the cycad, happily disemboweling a *Haplocanthosaurus*.

The Midsummer Night Drive-In was late in starting its main feature, a remake of *From Here to Eternity*, and this brought a chorus of car horns from the congregation of automobiles assembled for the show. He awoke suddenly, startled and groggy, and the sound was enough like a few in his own time that he *really* lost it this time, not only his bearings but his balance, and fell over. The movie started, the horns stopped, and he managed to doze off and on for about an hour.

He stretched and roared. That felt good. He rolled around in the grass for awhile, to get at some sore and itchy spots on his side and back, and that felt even better. He rose to his full height and, looking over a stand of trees, caught a bright, flickering movement in the distance. Cautiously, he edged forward for a better view.

On the screen, a man and a woman were rolling around in tight embrace in the Hawaiian surf. Higher and higher the surf went, pounding, pounding... There was a jump cut to a shot of a supply train snaking its way along then plunging into a tunnel. Plunging, plunging...

He whimpered as the cycad extended between his legs. *It's going to be a long night*, he thought as he crouched once again and began his dance on the grass.

The audience at the drive-in were almost uniformly engaged in similar kinds of activity; however, the film itself had little effect on their libidos, so inured were they to such symbolism.

On the other hand, had they known of the anachronistic voyeur nearby, and the effect even such simpleminded renderings had on him, they might have felt less comfortable about the second feature at the drive-in, a grittier, more violent and "realistic" remake of *Dirty Harry*.

"Would you look at what he did to somebody's car, Ben?"

"Somebody's car? Somebody's car?" Millicent had been well beyond fed-up for some time, and her R-brain was proceeding towards a state of agitation that would not have been out of place among predators fifteen million years ago. "Look what's happened to this house!"

"Surely you must have insurance."

"I think somebody's on the rag, Bill."

Despite centuries of societal conditioning to the contrary, Millicent put her fist in Ben's face. He pitched over the indented hood of the Toyota, his head causing the exposed air filter, rattling around among pieces of engine in the hoodless car, to pivot on the back of his neck and snap onto his shoulders like a collar. It looked vaguely Elizabethan.

"We can have you hanged for that!" Bill snapped at Millicent.

"Hey, never mind there, Bill. 'Kitten with a whip'—I like it!"

"You always did go in for the kinky stuff, Ben."

"Carburetor," Roger said.

"All right," Millicent said. "This is what I want to happen. First, I want to see your boss or manager or homecoming queen or whatever. Then I want you and your high-tech dildo designers to get all your stuff out of here. Then we're all going to get ourselves lawyers,

and I'm going to sue your asses back to the Stone Age. Now, *get out!* Not you, Roger—*them!*"

Ben whistled. Bill shook his head sadly.

"Actually, ma'am," he began. "I think we've been pretty charitable about letting you stay."

"What the hell do you mean, 'letting us stay'?"

"You want to show her, Ben?"

"Sure thing, Bill." Ben went into the kitchen and ruffled through some of the file folders on the table. He returned shortly with a thick document of flimsy pages.

"You see, Mrs. Bennett," he said, "we bought your house while you both were on the porch outside. The deal came in over the porta-fax. In fact, we bought *all* the houses."

"We own Stratford Heights," Bill said.

"Well," Ben continued, "we already owned the land. It used to be a burial ground for experimental laboratory animals. But I assure you the amount of residual radiation is well within the limits we have defined as safe."

"I can't believe this." Millicent was stunned. "Our house was never up for sale!"

"That's just a technicality, ma'am," Bill said.

"It's all in here, Mrs. Bennett." Ben handed her the document.

Millicent absently flipped through the thick sheaf of paper. *My house*, she thought. *How could they buy my house without me wanting them to buy it?* She would get a lawyer. She would sue. No one was going to take her house away from her.

"Um, if you'll notice on page seventy-five, you both signed in agreement

of the deal."

"I signed no such thing!"

"Remember that registered letter from your brother? You signed for that, didn't you?"

"But—"

"Always read the fine print, ma'am."

"So now what? Do we just leave? Did we get our asking price, or did we just sign away the house for free?"

"Uh oh..." Ben started uncomfortably.

"Wasn't that in the contract?" Bill mumbled.

"Look how thick it is, Bill; we tried to think of everything..."

"So now what do we do, Ben?"

Ben shrugged.

"We haggle," he said.

Within thirty minutes of the opening credits of *Dirty Harry*, he went crazy. It was almost beyond his control. All that pent-up frustration, the sense of powerlessness... Then the thought came unbidden into his mind: *You're invincible, you're angry, and you have the right to destroy anything that gets in the way.* He started by smearing the Midsummer Night Drive-In over the surrounding countryside.

You don't fit in, the system doesn't want you.

What on Earth was "the system"?

Get even at all costs.

Well, that much he could understand. He happily set to the task of getting even.

Anything upright was game. Houses, trees, the water tower. He destroyed the sewage treatment plant in about forty minutes, noting that the smell was barely worse than the smell that always seemed to pervade this place. He destroyed Hamlet High,

though few were likely to mourn that. He hardly noticed the entourage of ice-cream vans following him, but when he did, he took great delight in destroying them, too. It was a wonderful night! Maybe this place wasn't so bad, after all.

He was making a beeline through the Touchstone Terrace condominium development when he saw the First Desdemona Congregation of the Stratford Heights Universal Church. Mighty, it was, and tall. He felt compelled to go to it, even though he didn't really understand why, even though he wasn't sure if it was the best thing for him to do. He tore off the front of it, and looked inside. A calm came over him. A rising sense of fulfillment. He stared at the unfamiliar decorations within for several long moments. One of the strange animals that infested this place seemed to be floating at one end. Its arms were outstretched, the way his were, when he cried his triumph at the end of a hunt. He felt... Inspired! Yes, that was it! Inspired!

He turned away from the church and returned to the task of laying waste to the planned community.

He felt no less violent and destructive, but now, at least, he felt violent and destructive with a purpose.

Bill was back in the kitchen, monitoring the radio as the *Tyrannosaurus rex* laid waste to Stratford Heights. Ben, on the other hand, was having his sensibilities severely shaken by Millicent.

"It's coming this way!" Bill shouted from the kitchen.

Ben wiped his forehead with an already soaked handkerchief.

"Please, Mrs. Bennett. Can't we do this outside?"

"We don't leave this house until we settle on a fair price for it. Oh, and my name is Jacobson. Millicent Jacobson. I never changed it."

"It's tearing apart the High School!" Shrieked Bill.

"Please Mrs. Be— Jacobson."

"Ms. Jacobson. Now, what was the last figure we were working with?"

"I don't care! I don't care! Name any price; I'll sign it! Just let's get out of here!"

"You do remember we agreed to record all this?" Millicent indicated the tape recorder.

"Yes, yes; anything."

"I mean, you've just basically handed us a blank check."

"I know what I'm doing!"

"It's taking apart a church now! My God, is *nothing* sacred anymore!"

"Do you agree to the terms you've just stated?"

"Yes, yes, yes. I agree to any terms named by Millicent Jacobson on behalf of General Design Systems, in return for which she'll let us get out of here!"

"Oh God, Ben. The reports are just coming in from the sewage treatment plant. There's shit everywhere!"

Ben looked frantically in the direction of the kitchen.

Millicent leaned back in her chair and nonchalantly closed her eyes for a few moments.

"Okay," she said. "Here are the terms. Two million dollars per lot, for everyone in Stratford Heights."

"Are you crazy! There's no way—" Millicent sighed.

"I could hold you to your agreement, but personally, I see no reason to play hardball. Why don't we just sit back, take a breather, and start the bargaining process all over again, hm?"

"Okayokayokay. Two million per lot. Good, fair price. Still cheaper than a Stealth. Or a wrench."

Ben was already packing things up as he agreed to Millicent's terms.

"Bill! Bill! Come on! We got it; let's get going!"

Roger, who had gone unnoticed for most of the discussion, now quietly got up to answer the front door, having heard the same anemic buzzing sound that had announced the arrival of Bill and Ben.

"Good evening madam," a bullet-shaped device said in a harsh metallic voice. "May I assume I am addressing the lady of the house?"

Roger whimpered.

The second time bomb almost worked the way it was supposed to. At least it worked in the right direction. Almost.

He was happily back among his beloved cycads, face once again buried in the entrails of a *Plateosaurus*. He didn't know how he got back, but he was pleased that he had. In fact, he chalked it up to his own superior predator's cunning and skill. He escaped a hostile environment barely scathed, and all was intact, even though he now insisted on attaching palm fronds to his feet, and required his offspring to kneel before him. But he comforted himself that despite his harrowing ordeal, he was, at least, not changed by the experience. All was well.

Roger and Millicent, and all the remaining survivors of Stratford Heights graciously accepted their checks for two million dollars from General Design Systems and continued on happily with their lives. Roger eventually recovered, although Millicent realized she

couldn't tell the difference. Despite that, all was well.

Bill and Ben finally consummated the homosexual love affair implied by the overt maleness of their working relationship. They decided to quit General Design Systems and go to work for children's educational programming. All was well.

Stratford Heights was restored as a planned community *and* a burial ground for experimental laboratory animals, owned and operated by

General Design Systems.

All was well.

Meanwhile, however, William Shakespeare was having some difficulty getting on the 1A bus uptown to Osric Lane. And no astronomer had as yet noticed that the primordial asteroid whose impact had led to the last great dinosaur extinction had been liberated from the late Cretaceous period and was now purposefully making its way towards twentieth-century Earth. •

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A MUCH UPDATED RUIN

J.B. Scisizzi
illustrated by Richard Leggatt

Still we must take chances, choose our next minute, stutter earthly acts and words to them, signals from simpler but more fatal galaxies, little truths to their taste that will just suffice to lose us, and hours and hours that will tunnel into us and bring us back to a confused beginning, to a slow building up towards never, towards afterwards, towards burning out.

— Homero Aridjis/Persephone

In an overly illuminated lab in montreal wilder/penfield works late mapping the lobes of digital advertising onto a sedated mcluhan. The marshal waits alone in a sensory deprivation chamber, his skin pasted with a chemical compound consisting of, amongst other poisons, peanut butter and german diesel fluid. On the screen of his mind flickers the blankness of uninterrupted black leader. He coheres with the avant garde.

Carmen watches fare-scoffing anorexics in hot pinks and green, all grunge, all butchered hair and uncaring. A man, his light brown pants too long, stepped on, wet and torn and ripped, a pea green suit jacket old, worn, too small, and a black and gray toque even though this was may. You wouldn't notice at first that he wasn't wearing shoes or socks because his feet were such a dark brown, an urban mud which totally enveloped the ruralness of bare feet. He ordered



cappuccino with cinnamon, telling the proprietor after it arrived that he would pay next time. The proprietor shrugged a helpless damascus shrug: *sure, pay me next time.*

And I, and tomorrow. And then the next day launches ahead with little more regard than the littlest wave on a smaller pond than the icy patch outside my front door. I step but cautiously, curiously awakened to the sound of birds chirping in flat tones somewhere above my head, somewhere entrenched, ensconced in the cavities of my garage. The products of their waste lay in delicate impressionistic patterns upon the cold hood of my jetta. I smile at their attempts at art, amused by the encroachment of nature into the domain of humanity.

And then nietzsche, her clinging claws pulling at and unraveling the threads of my birthday sweater, dares to rub her infested little neck against mine with a purring sound so fake I can only imagine the years of method acting she has had to endure to reach this stage. I am horrified by the smell she exudes, so late night and brutal. So down right bestial! If it wasn't for that family of rodents which moved in somewhere behind the kitchen cupboards I would have rid myself of her long ago. Felines, someone said, are an alien race sent from beyond alpha centauri and entrusted with the mission of sucking us free of love and compassion. Sucking out our love wallets.

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I let nietzsche outside, her whiskers twitching tentatively in the rock bottom temperature of the december morning, her raccoon markings offering no camouflage against the thin layers of ice and snow which decorate the neighborhood. Wondering as I start the engine: are birds as alien as their feline predators? I bandy around the various possibilities and speculative permutations of this intriguing thesis as I whisk in and out of traffic with the expertise of a go-cart enthusiast. The radio announces another political assassination in burundi, another plague of wild locusts in somalia (are there plagues of *tame* locusts?), a film shooting in new/baghdad with saul/rubinek as saddam/hussain. The weather reporter, her voice cutting in and out through the rotor blades of the helicopter, calls for more snow.

How mortified the morphology, the remainders of the day. His computer image swirls into new topologies, enhanced patterns of psychometerological systems. Heidegger injects the syringe with a roaring cry, his head tilts upwards, eyes piercing through the cracked dome ceiling. His snorting breath inhales the melange of overhanging circuits and charge-coupled devices. There are no tears, no words of forgiveness. No god to save him.

He was lying in a burnt-out basement—or was it the war?

I was kneeling in a broken down relic, a coffee-stained percolator relic barely old enough to be on the shelf. Waiting. The long forgotten waiting.

And you, with mouth so tory with eyes deeper than my grandfather's mattress, sinking into mine; no, sliding away from mine with nowhere to go. Nowhere but the imagination and there I find the clutter so filling that years of attica plunder still fails to discern, to distinguish, one reality from one fatal plunge. And I, plunging from here to the abyss there.

I was lying in a burnt out basement holding on to the memory of hands pulling, tunics ripping, insignias falling into murky puddles, so ice cold fresh. Diving for insignias, someone, away from the bullets which wait behind boulders so hidden by the rain, by the single-file movement of us, the one before me and the one after, the one seen and the other heard, and nothing really heard but my mind wandering as my feet trudge the course on automatic, my eyes on their own, wary of the tipping of wings, the sudden avian signal of incoming obstacles or enemies.

Bespeckled Dr. Spectre relaxes on the bordello balcony exhaling mushroom clouds into the air, memories of god and country fading away, the encompassing gloom distorting with silence the agonies of her incoming cries. The radio at his feet plays a static sonata, the tv monitors overhead storm down in a white-noise waterfall. The good doctor is at peace. He ignores the burning red and blue warning lights transmitted to his dry, withered eyes by optical wireless—the familiar tale of another barbarian at the gates. With rolled eyes and bored sigh he throws down the stock reports

and heads within.

On the screen the u.s. government displays its latest advance in peaceware: an orbiting satellite of neuroadvertising. The technological innovations are explained to the public via a sampled jack/kerouac in conversation with Data. Heidegger lurks in the background holding a shaky cappuccino in both hands.

Forgetting that the terminal is set to random, Duncan watches the images cut away along the preselected channels: an al/pacino film, a middle eastern war or war movie, a soccer game, a live kidnapping, a *Thunderbirds* re-run, the new twin/peaks series, andrew/mccarthy as johnny/quest, nuclear explosions, revolutions in pakistan, magicians in alaska, a cooking class, a cryptology class, a neuro-mapping class, a reading by thomas/pynchon, interactive woodstock, a live version of *Doom*, jethro/tull in concert, current trends in tuberculosis or radiation sickness, leos/carax in conversation, a raoul/ruiz festival, the falling tower of pisa, sex among grown pygmies, sex between consenting nuns, theological arguments against the conspiracy of swallows, a theatrical version of *Skikasta*, a musical version of *Being and Nothingness*, a literary debate between samuel/r/delany and marilyn/hacker, the latest update on the holocaust, a live version of *American Psycho* starring bret/easton/ellis, william/s/burroughs on pet and gun control, pee/wee/herman on onto-theology, kathy/acker on babysitting, a brazilian hanging, a russian crime

syndicate, a los/vegas wedding, a mexican divorce, a hollywood ending, the end of the world as we know it, and a baby's arm holding an apple.

As the u.s. government returns, the station cuts to a commercial.

The coldness of my heart is now immune to the dissolution of friendships. The comings and goings of those whom I loved in my idealism have been replaced by a quantifiable algorithm which takes into consideration aspects of moral, ethical, and epistemological perspectives. The weltanschauung of others are carefully sifted and analyzed in advance for their degrees of compatibility with my own. Each friday I consult the online advice of my ideo-astrologist for designing the course of my following week, and invariably I tailor my thinking in accordance with maximum sociability and minimum argumentation.

On my calendar, the days outlined in red represent my periods of idiosyncratic philosophizing. I connect with those of my radioactive wavelength for round table discussions of current events and gaming trends, sniffing around the dregs of the ethernet for the titillation of unstable prose and disrupted narratives.

Who is it who hides within the noted cloak? The narrative cloak with the cagian soundtrack outside where I should be. If only I could relinquish the last spikes pounded through my feet which hold me down for a tomorrow which my lack of rsvp suggests I don't believe in.

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Dr. Spectre addresses the u.n. with a laser baton in his belt and a cat in his arms. He orders everyone out of the global village by sundown last. Un-diplomatic laughter ensues, but the doctor can only smile.

Memories of an alaskan warehouse grip Carmen with the relentlessness of a commercial espresso machine. She performs a sleight-of-hand dusting along fireplace objects held in extreme close-up: a photograph of a young girl, a couple at dinner, copies of the *Qur'an* and *I Ching*, a ceramic jar with japanese characters.

She dreams awake of squealing tires in old movies.

The darkness of twilight at the last pole, the last pole of daylight when love overcomes my mind, a sink hole of desire of despair of anger and delight when there's nothing else to hold onto but love and love is so far away its dim incandescence bleeds towards me only half-heartedly. Why is this the only way? Where is the last salvation of tomorrow's deadline? And the next day? What pieces of filth will drip down, awaiting, hung in suspense until I take the fatal step that lands me in the water scum? These days shall never come again. I am the last one to even want to come this way. Never again shall I consent to such a procedure. The hours which drift by like the scudding clouds of a tangier nightfall awaken me to reveries even the blandest dreams cannot dissipate. And to think of what I have had to undergo to come out here,

here where stories can be told in all their pristine dishonesty! For truth is the banal essence of the wonder of an experience which still remains beyond the pale of language. And tomorrow's language? Still a day away. A long day when the sun refuses to go gently into the emptying night; the day when death burns out the sun with a whimpering bang. This is the day I long for. This is the last moment of my belief system.

Pyke strolls through a long memory of confused people, kicking through the leaves of thin white ash which congregate around his ankles. Autumn continues eternal.

He runs the updated program on the computer, clicking his way through a swarm of digital landscapes, a morphed series of characters and scenarios. The room has adopted the odour of sulphur.

He observes Carmen'90 pixel her way through a random sequence of enclosures, watches as she follows the sound of wind to a door on which she clicks, follows with her the trail of heavy breathing which serpentine down a long winding path to what appears to be a basement door. She clicks and they enter.

Prostrated before the golden age of television is Duncan, a crown of thorns tattoo on his bald head and two small streams of blood escaping from his nostrils. As Carmen goes to click on the body Pyke tries ineffectually to stop her: Duncan leaps up with a 12-inch knife and begins repeatedly stabbing Pyke's body. Pyke falls to the ground, unbleeding, des-

perately wanting to wrestle control of the program from Carmen but to no avail.

Death is not an issue.

Duncan returns to the couch and sets the tv terminal on manual, clicking through a dozen or so programs before stopping at *Slaughter 5000*, the new comedy troupe from england. He masturbates during the commercials.

When I am sad and sit in my room in the dark listening to old records, growing more and more melancholy and depressed, I know this is actually a revitalization of my sanity. At those times when I am full of joy, or fear, or some other powerful emotion which fills me with the substance of life, I know that I am actually separated from my reality. My mind, when dispassionate, and capable of rational, objective consideration, views my situation in the three dimensions of the classically reproduced world: I see the blunt, quotidian nature of my reality, of my existence within the world. Emotions colour my world with artificial tints; they add to the unreality of my apprehension of my, and the world's, existence.

I have no desire to exist primarily in false consciousness.

Melancholy is the sign of my grasp on reality, it signals the removing of veils, the dispensing of illusions. Is this too grim a personal philosophy? Have I ignored the positive, constructive elements which attend the final dissolution of the psyche down to the raw core of the rational?

Without doubt. But those considerations have no place here. They must of necessity be left to the sequel.

On Data's country estate, spot and nietzsche are busy forging themselves a new reality wherein they can be human. We watch them take off across the front field, noting their direction, thinking to ourselves that whichever reality they leave behind must be the one to which we belong.

On the beach Pyke waits for something other than shelter. Raised rifles hold him in their scopes of twisted destruction. The scene reminds him of an old film noir or a french film with bad subtitling. He rubs his hands across the stubble of his face to erase as many present memories as he can, but the voiced-over narration returns to remind him of questions unasked and emotions repressed.

Hot lights draw steam from Carmen's rebellious tattoos. The good doctor lights another cigarillo and blows green smoke into her tightly restrained face. He claps his hands and laughs at her heroic bravado, her incessant growling.

"We will fight you on the seas and oceans, the hills and valleys, the moons and moonlets. We will never surrender."

Behind the torrent of her rhetoric she is a bundle of frayed nerves, babbling like a towering automaton, her mind captivated by the horror of the good doctor's operating theatre and his displayed exhibition of serbian flags, british oars, chinese opium,

french manifestos, american credit cards, russian ice picks, african racial laws, chilean billy clubs, italian condoms, israeli fences, iraqi posters, iranian veils, irish pulpits, canadian constitutions, german wanderlust, and u.n. neutrality.

More than slightly intoxicated, Duncan flips through the bordello pictodext and orders another: this one was east/indian, 22, with large beautiful lips and a degree in socio-genetics. "It's all so depressing."

The nose-ringed woman was cute but he kept going.

Pyke poses in three-quarter shot, a thin smile under broad nose thick dark hair parted left and cut short. He's leaving, the car waiting, a white t-shirt hiding his chest under an open long-sleeved shirt; he exits on a roll, paper and pen tucked in pocket waiting. As the shutter clicks he smiles good/bye and we think: kerouac forgot to shave this morning, he forgot to sleep last night; we think: this is Pyke.

And the wasteland grows. The remains of a sidewalk, cracked, dislevelled, the scattered morning papers already covering a block and still going. Scudding sections keep to the sidewalks, ignoring the road, the traffic.

Dr. Spectre gazes with approval at her mannequin features, the way her hair flows around the exposed nipples of her topless examination gown, a modernist picture of black

on black. She just another misguided revolutionary filled with moralistic idealism, another misprogrammed child still battling parental tyranny.

Carmen's eyes: purified fire; her smile: a sudden orgasm.

Dr. Spectre listens with unusual patience to her fossil discourse, concocting his homemade brew, his special virus designed to unglitch her system and wipe the program clean in a blaring of midnight trumpets. Fuck Nature if she abhors the pure, the vacuum, the self-possessed; this world nothing but the hollow home which devours its occupants.

The good doctor lectures her on the romanticism of tragic early ends, on the contrived nature of theologico-historical tales of being nailed to the didactic cross.

To live means to give up the ghost, he says. Cold chills crawl along her black and blue veins.

Conspiracy relieves the night of witenesses. Snippets of dialogue. A roll of celluloid, 35mm, left hanging from a peg near the refrigerator. The exposed bulb dangling from the ceiling has too much wattage for the space. Their eyes cringe. She notices the wrinkles around his eyes.

Duncan boards the bus with only 20 or so others.

Not a very large gene pool to repopulate the planet.

Although most of the seats were empty he crowds in with a jewish or muslim man and his two sons, closing his eyes as the bus pulls out along bay street. Even with his eyes shut

Duncan could see through his memory the exact path they were taking; each time the bus made a turn, so did his mental imaging. Now and then he would open his eyes and compare his memory with the road of reality: he found the map disturbingly perfect.

An hour or so later, as Duncan began falling asleep, the bus driver cranked up the radio much to his displeasure; it was an ancient rush song which finally lulled him to other worlds:

*And the men who hold high places
must be the ones to start
to forge a new reality
Closer to the Heart.*

The band strikes up a new tune, the drum rolls begin. Dr. Spectre cocks his eyebrows in a pre-arranged signal and sets the wheels of climax into motion.

"We shall not be overcome!"

The good doctor smiles a loving, devoted smile. He even fights back a tear as the dropped floor beneath Carmen's feet cuts short the historical moment of her final speech:

You bast—

From the artists colony telescope, Pyke watches the starships preparing to leave, noting with some wry amusement that the armada is being headed by the *uss/gilligan*.

Back at the bordello Dr. Spectre is in a foul mood. Some child is running amok in the phoenica/room creating a fierce amount of noise and I'm

afraid the good doctor is going to fire off a bolt and send the kid to damnation. As a preventative measure I aim a buffer beam in his direction and take off in search of the kid.

The young boy runs towards me laughing and grabs my hand; he wants to show me how the pencil sharpener works on bic lighters. *Oh, no*, I think, this could be the final straw, and so I instinctively multiply the intensity of my counteracting beam to ward off the inevitability of the doctor's ballistic anger.

Unfortunately, I miscalculate, and set the energy level too high, inadvertently destroying everyone in the world including the damned little boy.

When nothing remains. The passion dissipated, the heart worn down and out. Nothing left but nothing left but nothing left. And then the dregs. And the wasteland has nowhere to grow.

J. B. SCLISIZZI waits patiently each day for his desktop publishing job at the CBC to be extinguished. He has three unpublished novels lurking in his Toronto apartment, and would like to see Tom Waits as the new James Bond.

ILLUSTRATOR: RICHARD LEGATT is a freelance illustrator who lives, works, eats, and sometimes sleeps in Toronto.

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Dr. Spectre relaxes on the bordello balcony blowing cyclones into the corroded sunset.

"A beautiful evening for a wake."

His shrouded bride waits below, her white gown twisted around her body in a flattering style, her eyesockets decorated with a spectral camouflage of black circles. Carmen strains at her mental leash, her days rotating within a blinding expanse of black noise.

Dr. Spectre orders more almonds and red wine for his wife and calls for her to join him on the balcony. They stand together in a strange silence, eyes skyward, watching as the sun heads for a much updated ruin. As they embrace in a kiss, the nuptial bed only metres away, they miss the final setting of the sun.

The sun setting one last time before fizzling out forever. •

WINTER ACONITE¹

Sandra Kasturi

I know you thought you hid it well from me
but I found the skin anyway
slightly musty perhaps
in one of our body-sized attic trunks

I don't know why it never occurred to you
that I'd go looking
it might have been better
if you had never let me force the truth from you

I know you thought I'd find it hard to believe
but really
the signs were all there
your eyebrows
the palms of your hands
your once-monthly excursions

I don't know why I can't seem to let it go
but since I found it
it's in my head
in my head

¹ wolfsbane

*your soft skin
it burns in my mind's-eye
like nothing else*

I know that I've become strange to you
you have that narrow watchful look
in your eye
now

do you know what I've been doing
up in the attic
when you aren't home
and I feel the need to kill
time
I think maybe you suspect

*but do you know
how it calls to me*

you must know
you of all
people
must know

it's the skin
your beautiful skin
I take it out of the trunk
every day now
and stroke
stroke
its soft shining silver fur
finger its honed white teeth

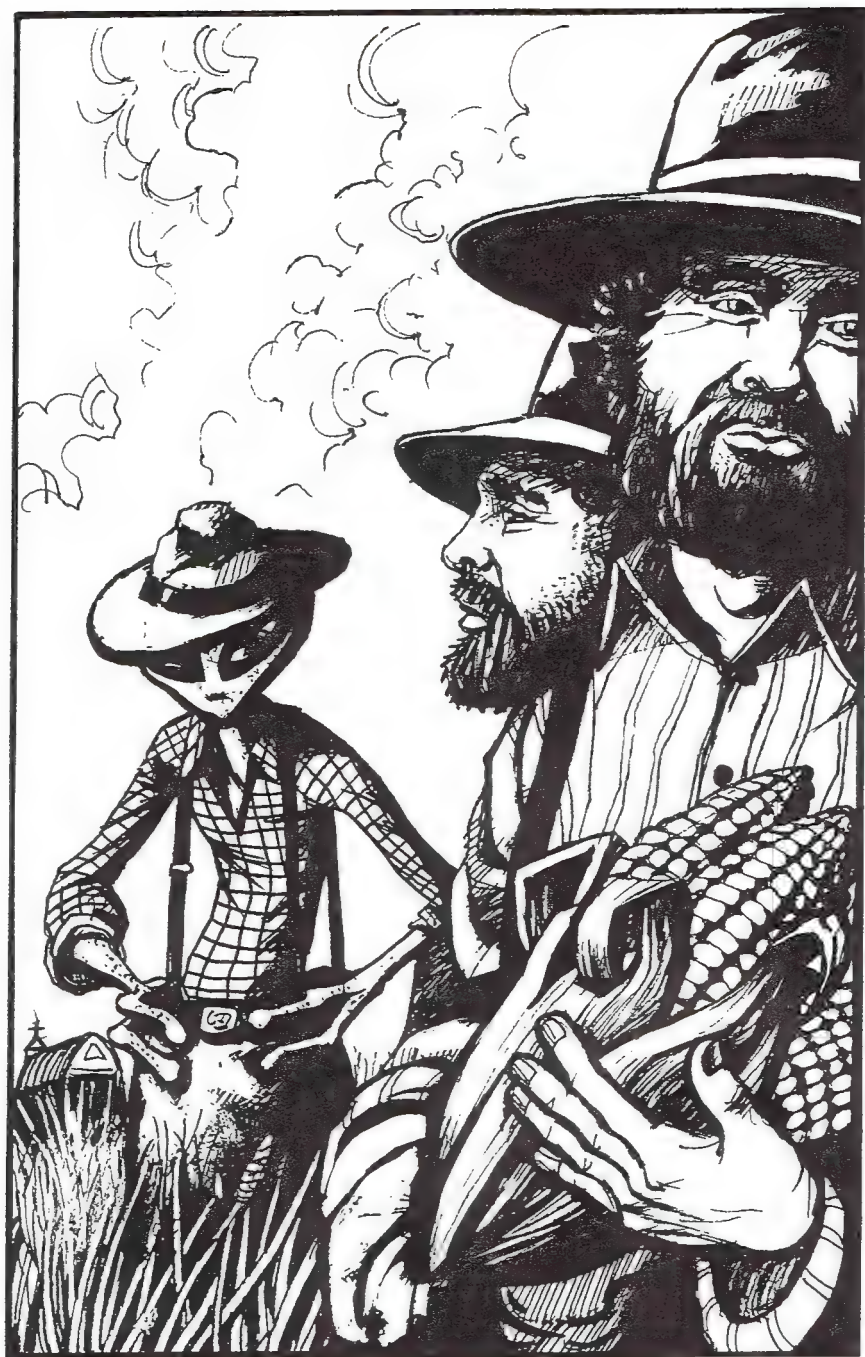
tomorrow
tomorrow night
I'll try it on
to check the fit
before you get home

*shall I wear it
just for you*

I'll be waiting for you
when you get home
I'll be in the bedroom
in my new silver pelt

look
look at it shine
in the round moon light •

SANDRA KASTURI is a Toronto poet and, once her attention span increases, a short story writer. She is an aficionado of Ogden Nash, Tchaikovsky, certain Ottawa/Toronto and Longueuil science fiction writers, Magritte, Sinatra, Raymond Chandler, Glenfiddich, and Jean-Luc Picard.



ABE EVER AFTER

Laurie Channer

illustrated by Mitchell Stuart

Two dozen black, broad-brimmed hats over white shirts over dark trousers drew near along the dirt laneway. The wheat field behind them made the picture perfect and I ran for my camera. In deference to the attitudes of these old order Mennonites, I took few pictures during this week of field research for my thesis on splinter communities, but this composition was too stunning to pass up.

The women had prepared an outdoor lunch set up in the yard back of the Buhler's place on a long trestle table. The menfolk were taking their midday break from harvesting. Like as not, they'd continue through till midnight with their horse-drawn threshers. The women's bonnets and dark dresses bustled around the tables, as they piled on rolls, pies, cold meat, corn and bowl after bowl of potato salad. Before coming here I'd heard a joke that when Mennonites had a potluck, everybody brought the potato salad. I didn't believe it was an exaggeration any more.

I helped with the food, dodging the children who had eaten earlier and were now chasing each other in a game of tag all around the yard. I'd learned on my first day in the community that no one would consent to be interviewed until the work at hand was done, so to expedite matters, I pitched in. I'd even put away my jeans and started wearing the only skirt I'd brought. Not that my bright, Indian-printed crinkle-chiffon fit in with the plain dresses and white aprons, but it was a modest length, and I didn't feel like I was offending sensibilities as much.

As we finished loading down the table, the men took turns at the pump between the Buhlers' house and barn, removing their hats to wash, rinsing the dust and

chaff off their faces and hands. The hats stayed off as they seated themselves for the prayer over the meal. The kids stopped running.

Peter Klassen said the blessing. Much as I tried to show respect for their customs, I couldn't help snitching a look over my folded hands at the heads bent in prayer. They were young and old, and being of German descent, those heads that weren't silver were topped with golden wheat-coloured hair.

Most. One lowered head down the table near the biscuits wasn't blond, or silver. It was bald, but there were a few of those, too. No, what set this one apart was that it looked decidedly green. I craned surreptitiously, and caught sight of an oddly-shaped ear just as the chorus of Amens sounded and the black hats reappeared like a flock of ravens settling on the faithful.

Two dozen arms reached for food and I lost him in the flurry. Grabbing the nearest pitcher of lemonade, I leapt up to play waitress so I could scan the faces. I passed up and down the table, studying the broad brims bent as earnestly over their food as the bare heads had been over their prayer. I went through the motions of pouring, sloshing a fair bit of the lemonade as I watched people instead of glasses. A flicker of colour down the row caught my eye again as a green arm in a rolled-up white sleeve reached for the platter of corn. I slammed Henry Fehr's glass back down half-filled and hustled over. "Lemonade?"

He couldn't have been a more textbook alien. His skin stretched tightly over a wedge-shaped face. The eyes were huge and entirely coal-black. Three-fingered, leaf-green hands

grasped the bright yellow cob of corn delicately. He nodded and murmured his thanks in Plattdeutsch, the Low German these Mennonites spoke when they weren't talking to me or other outsiders.

I stared until Berthe Muller called me over to a side table to help cut apple pies for dessert. I backed away slowly, simultaneously very sure and very unsure of what I'd seen. No one else at the table behaved as if there was anything unusual in their midst. I began to wonder if, as the sole bonnetless woman, I'd gotten too much sun.

"Berthe, who's that?" I pointed.

"Who?" she replied, looking up at the row of men wolfing down their lunch.

Somehow, even though we were looking at a bunch of Mennonites and what I now firmly believed was an alien being, it felt ridiculous to say, "The green one".

"The one with three fingers," I said. That was a safe place to start.

"Oh, that's Hermann Hildebrandt," she answered in her heavy accent, turning back to the pies. "He lost two fingers in a mower last spring."

This was no farming accident. "No, Berthe," I said. "Three fingers on each hand. Next to Hermann."

"With green skin, you mean? Why didn't you say? That's Abe," she replied matter-of-factly, and walked away with the pies.

I managed to get several of the women talking while we washed and dried dishes. The men had gone back to the fields.

I did my best to act casual. "Where did Abe come from?"

"Jakob Dyck's cornfield," Anna

Krueger said. "His—" she had trouble with the word and turned to consult in Plattdeutsch with a couple of the others. "His *machine*," she went on, "had an accident there. Ten years ago. He has been with us ever since."

Of course. A UFO in a cornfield. Textbook. "What about the—" I searched for my own word, and decided against *planet*, "*—place* he came from?"

The women all shrugged at each other. "Nobody asked about it," Renetta Klassen finally said. "He didn't tell us, so we didn't pry."

It took all of my willpower not to jump and shake everybody by the shoulders. "You don't know *anything* about where he's from? How could you not ask?"

My frustration must have shown because Elsie, a plump, grandmotherly woman, stepped over and put a hand on my arm. "We just don't," she said. "It's our way. When someone comes to the community, they are accepted. Do you know about Michelle?" she asked eagerly.

Michelle was the reason I'd focused on this particular group, after reading an old newspaper article. Twenty years ago, Michelle had been trapped in a man's body, a would-be transsexual who, when she came to the realization at the age of fifty, found oppression as she tried to transform her life and live as a woman in the city. She'd found this community, and they'd taken her in as she was, physically male, searching for inner peace and acceptance as a female. Michelle had lived easily with the Mennonites, in bonnet and plain dress, quilting, cooking and babysitting until she died at sixty-five a few years ago. She'd even had a beau. This com-

munity wasn't vain enough to feel pride in having taken her in, they were just happy that Michelle had been happy among them.

As inspiring a story as it was, Michelle was small potatoes now.

"Listen, I said, "back to Abe. I'm not a Mennonite," I said. "Could I ask him about where he came from?"

Several of the women flashed puzzled, *why would you want to?* looks and Anna laughed out loud. "You're not wanting him for yourself are you? He's already married to Jakob's daughter Sarah."

I was stunned. I'd met Sarah the day before. "Married? Really?"

"Ja," Berthe chimed in, "but poor Abe, they have no children. Sarah is barren."

The others nodded sadly. "It's very odd," Renetta added, "because the Dyck women all bear many children."

They were still puzzling over *that* mystery as I excused myself to go and write up a whole new set of interview questions.

Someone had passed the word, and when I showed up that evening on the porch of Abe's plain wooden house which was virtually identical to every other farmhouse in the town, he was waiting for me, rocking and smoking a corncob pipe. So was Jakob Dyck, an elder of the town, a thin, sixtyish man with many years of hard farming behind him and many more ahead.

"Good evening, Jakob, I didn't expect to see you," I said politely. It was Jakob who had explained my presence to the others at their Sunday service nearly a week before. Much as I wanted to talk to Abe alone, it wouldn't be respectful to ask Jakob to leave.

"Abe has no English, only *Plattdeutsch*," Jakob replied in his thick German accent. Jakob barely had English himself. "I will translate."

"You mean, he only has *Plattdeutsch* and his own language," I corrected gently. The cassette recorder in my pocket was waiting to catch a truly alien tongue.

Jakob turned in his chair and exchanged a few words with Abe. "*Nein*," he said, shifting back. "*Plattdeutsch* only. He has forgotten the other."

My heart sank. Just like that, an alien tongue had been calmly dismissed forever. Abe didn't appear the least bit perturbed. I wondered why it didn't bother him.

I turned to Abe. Except for the green hands and face that were visible, every other inch of him looked the contented farmer. It struck me that this scene was far more normal than it should have been. Crickets even chirped in the darkness. "What was it like where you came from?"

Jakob translated for me and Abe replied. His answer was several sentences long, judging by the cadence and pauses. He finished and nodded to Jakob.

"Not so good as here," Jakob said.

"And?"

"Here is better," Jakob said.

"He said more than that," I pressed. "I heard him."

"Ja," Jakob nodded. "It is all to say he is much happier here. Abe is not missing his old country."

"Abe," I said, hoping he'd pick up the gravity of my tone, "I would still like to know anything you can tell me about where you're from. Even the parts you don't think are important."

Another exchange followed between the two men. To the untrained ear, their *Plattdeutsch* sounded a little like Yiddish. Jakob finally turned to me again. "Abe is sorry, but he is not happy in his past. He wishes not to speak about it. I wish not to ask him. Mennonites know how it is to have a past that is painful."

Of course. Their ancestors had been persecuted for centuries and chased across Europe until reaching North America. But surely it was nothing compared to what it took to send a lone being hurtling away from his own planet forever. Who could imagine the conditions or upheaval in an alien society that might force such a drastic voyage? It looked like the human race would never know now, simply because it was impolite to pry.

The front door squeaked and a woman appeared in the doorway. Sarah Dyck greeted me in English, then spoke briefly to her husband. Abe got up and followed her inside. "He will be back," Jakob told me.

I took the opportunity of Abe's absence to try out a theory I'd been mulling over on Jakob. "Was it Abe's appearance that caused your group to split off from the Mennonite Central Committee?" I asked.

Jakob shook his head. "We have been separate for much longer than that. It began when my grandfather was branded a heretic for putting bells on his sleigh."

Another dead end. We sat in silence for several minutes. Jakob puffed on his pipe and I brooded as I stared off into the warm night.

Finally, he broke the silence. "I could tell you about Michelle," the old man said helpfully.

"I know about Michelle," I tried not to snap. "Don't you think Abe is just a little more unusual than Michelle?"

"Oh, no," came the reply. "Abe told me once he has always been a man."

That gave me an idea and when the door squeaked again and Abe returned to his rocking chair, I started in on another tack. "How is your health?" I asked Abe.

This was easier, but still unrewarding. I found out in short order that Abe was very fit and had never been sick since he'd been with the Mennonites. The air agreed with him, the climate agreed with him, and the hard work very much agreed with him. Even the food agreed with him. Jakob caught on and added a conspiratorial aside after translating one of Abe's responses. "I know what you're after," he said. "There is something odd about Abe. *He won't eat potato salad.*" He sat back with a look of satisfaction at having imparted something faintly scandalous.

Propriety reared its head again and Jakob cut me off before my questions about Abe's physical condition could get personal. As a woman, I wasn't going to get to hear anything about internal workings, or parts of the body I couldn't see when he was fully clothed. I sulked, stonewalled again.

After another long, silent pause, Abe suddenly broke in animatedly, with much expansive gesturing toward the distance. My heart leapt. He was talking about the stars, or maybe his trip. I waited eagerly for Jakob to pass it all on.

"Abe is very proud of his corn," Jakob said. "He would like to talk about that."

It would have been an insult to refuse.

Abe chattered away and even took me on a tour through his best cornfield in the moonlight. I gazed wistfully at the stars. Abe never looked up once.

Then a thought struck. "What happened to the machine?" I asked. "Is the machine he arrived in still around?"

"Ja," Jakob said. "It's in the barn."

Abe led the way again, and it took every ounce of restraint I had not to bolt ahead. He stopped in the barn to fondle the soft ears of one of the horses with his long, odd fingers before moving to an indistinct shape under horse blankets. Then he pulled the blankets aside.

It had been sleek; the lines were still evident. It had been shiny; Abe fussed at a tiny spot where the flat black paint had flaked off the lustrous metal. It had been turned into a sleigh. With bells.

The evening wound down. We walked back to the house where Sarah was sitting on the porch, waiting for her husband. Milk and cookies were set out. Jakob took his leave and headed back to the Dyck farm. I glumly accepted an oatmeal cookie. Abe swigged milk gratefully. No doubt all that talking about corn had made him thirsty. I didn't have the heart or energy to grill Sarah about life with an alien, mostly because I knew I'd only end up hearing about life with a model farmer.

I stayed long enough to be polite, then excused myself, asking Sarah to convey my thanks to Abe for his time. They wished me good night and I started off down the road to the Klassens, who were putting me up. My ride back to the city would be arriving first thing in the morning. When you came right down to it, the presence of an alien would have thrown off the whole focus of my thesis, anyway. I

would have had to ignore anything interesting I might have gotten.

I heard the footsteps before I heard her call. "Wait, wait!" Sarah caught up to me about a hundred yards from their gate. "Abe is sorry that maybe he wasn't interesting enough for you. He asks instead, have you heard about Michelle?"

It was all I could take. "I don't understand, Sarah," I said at last. "I know you don't have TV or radios or romance novels here, but don't you people realize how different Abe really is? He's an alien!"

"Alien?" Sarah repeated thoughtfully. "I don't know this word."

"You know," I pressed on. "Not of this world. An entirely different being. An outsider. From a place where everything is different. They communicate differently, they don't use buggies to get around—" I stopped.

The expression on Sarah's face had changed from puzzlement to the bemused, slightly paternalistic look I'd been getting from people all week. The look that excused my intrusions and gaffes because I came from the city and didn't know the customs, the

language, or any better. Yes, Sarah knew exactly what an alien was.

I did now, too.

•

I left the next morning with my notebooks full of observations on old order Mennonite culture, faith and society. They bundled me into the car with the gift of a hand-sewn apron, several still-warm pies and a bushel of perfect, sweet, yellow corn grown by a green-skinned, three-fingered farmer.

When my photos came back from the lab, I had one stunning shot of Mennonite men on a dirt road against a field of waving wheat. If you know what to look for, and you look very closely, you can make out that one of the men's faces, half-hidden by the brim of his broad black hat, isn't quite the same as the others.

Dian Fossey wouldn't sell out her mountain gorillas for tourism and I have too much respect for the Dycks, the Klassens and the others to turn my photo over to Project Blue Book.

Besides, the alien disappeared ten years ago. He's been Abe ever since. •

LAURIE CHANNER is a prize-winning and several-times published short story writer whose work ranges from mainstream to SF, from the humorous to the deeply weird. She has completed a first SF novel and doesn't have nearly enough time to work on her second. Laurie lives in Toronto and works in the film industry.

ILLUSTRATOR: MITCHELL STUART is a freelance artist who runs PANGAEA Illustration and Design, based in Sherwood Park, Alberta.

A S K M R . S C I E N C E

Do you have a question concerning life or the true nature of the universe? Mr. Science can answer it! Send your question to: Ask Mr. Science, c/o ON SPEC Magazine, Box 4727, Edmonton, AB T6E 5G6

Mr. EH of Vancouver, BC, asks:

Q : What is the definition of a "domesticated animal?"

A : Any animal for which the Ralston-Purina company makes a "chow" food product is, by definition, a domesticated animal. One can buy Purina Dog Chow, Purina Cat Chow, Purina Rabbit Chow, Purina Goat Chow, Purina Hamster Chow and many others. Their latest trials concern development of a food product which will not come apart in salt water and is attractive to crustaceans. When Purina Horseshoe Crab Chow hits the market later this year, another animal will have been successfully domesticated.

Ms. DM of Vancouver, BC, asks:

Q : If all the cars are put on one side of a B.C. Ferry, would the ferry turn over and sink?

A : First, an explanation for the benefit of our land-locked Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan readers who are not familiar with bodies of water larger than a bathtub. A ferry is a large boat which, in this case, can carry over 500 cars and 2000 passengers on trips over at least 45 kilometers of open water.

If all vehicles with engines which rotate clockwise (as viewed from the front) are lined up facing forward on the port side, the torque produced by running their engines at high speed will counteract the natural tendency of their weight to cause the ferry to list, roll over and sink.

Incidentally, in a recent experiment, a ferry with its massive engine flywheel mounted on a vertical shaft was not a success. It could do nothing but travel in small circles.

Mr. HG, of Blaine, WA, asks:

Q : The latest value of the Hubble constant shows the universe is much younger than the oldest visible stars. How is this possible?

A : The longer light travels the more tired it becomes. As it tires it loses energy, becoming redder in color. When this factor is taken into consideration in determining the value of the Hubble constant, the age of the universe is found to be 17.37 billion years, as predicted by Mr. Science long ago. •

ON Writing:

SECRET WEAPONS OF SCIENCE

Robert J. Sawyer

Okay—I admit it. I've got an arts degree. There, the cat's out of the bag: despite the cosmology and relativity and paleontology and genetics in my novels, I haven't taken a science course since high school.

But, hey, I'm not alone in that among practitioners of hard SF. Look at Fred Pohl, who writes about artificial intelligence and black holes and quantum theory. He never even graduated from high school. And, yeah, sure, Kim Stanley Robinson, who is detailing the terraforming of our neighboring world in his *Red Mars* trilogy, is indeed *Doctor* Robinson—but his PhD is in (gasp!) English literature.

So how do we non-scientist SF writers keep up with science? Well, I can't speak for everyone, but I rely on six secret weapons.

First, and most important, there's *Science News: The Weekly Newsmagazine of Science*. You can't get it on any news stand (although many libraries carry it). I've been a subscriber for thirteen years now, and I credit it with fully half of the science in my novels and short stories.

Science News is published weekly, and each issue is just sixteen pages long—you can read the whole thing over one leisurely lunch. Aimed at the intelligent lay person, it contains summaries of research papers appearing in *Nature*, *Science*, *Cell*, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *Physical Review Letters*, *The New England Journal of Medicine*, and hundreds more, as well as reports from all the major scientific conferences in Canada and the United States, plus original feature articles on topics ranging from quarks to the greenhouse effect to Neanderthal fossils to junk DNA. There is simply no better source for keeping up to date.

(Of course, the key is to actually make use of the material. Both Michael Crichton

and I read the same little piece in *Science News* years ago about the possibility of cloning dinosaurs from blood preserved in the bellies of mosquitoes trapped in amber. Me, I said "Neat!" and turned the page; Crichton went off and made a few million from the idea.) *Science News* is published by Science Service, Inc., 1719 N Street NW, Washington, DC 20036, (202) 785-2255. Canadian subscriptions are US\$50.50 for one year; US\$84.00 for two years; US subscriptions are US\$44.50 for one year; US\$78 for two years.

My second secret weapon: *Time* magazine. Yup, that's right: *Time*. Each year a few issues will have science cover stories. Buy them—they're pure gold. You won't find better introductions to scientific topics anywhere. Recent examples: *The Chemistry of Love* (February 15, 1993); *The Truth About Dinosaurs* (April 26, 1993); *How Life Began* (October 11, 1993); *Genetics: The Future is Now* (January 17, 1994); *How Humanity Began* (March 14, 1994); *When Did the Universe Begin?* (March 6, 1995); and *In Search of the Mind* (July 31, 1995). Not only will each one suggest many story ideas (the novel I just finished, *Frame-shift*, owes a lot to the two 1994 issues I mention above), but they will also give you all the background and vocabulary you need to write knowledgeably about the sciences in question.

In fact, I find that magazine articles tend to be better than books for giving me what I need quickly and efficiently. And that brings me to secret weapon number three: Magazine Database Plus on the CompuServe Information Service, the world's largest commercial

computer network.

MDP contains the full text of over two hundred general-interest and specialty publications, many going all the way back to 1986. Among the titles of obvious use to SF writers are *Astronomy*, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, *Discover*, *Omni*, *Popular Science*, *Psychology Today*, *Scientific American*, *Sky & Telescope*, and, yes, good old *Science News* and *Time*.

A year ago, when I was writing my novel *Starplex*, I needed to learn about "dark matter"—that mysterious, invisible substance that we know, because of its gravitational effects, constitutes ninety percent of our universe. Well, in less than a minute, MDP provided me with sixty-nine citations of articles on that topic, ranging from lay discussion in the newsmagazines *The Economist* and *US News and World Report* to twenty-one articles in—of course—*Science News*. There's no charge beyond normal CompuServe connect-time for generating such a bibliography. You can then either head off to your local library and dig up the articles there for free, or you can download the full text of any that interest you for US\$1.50 a pop. To access Magazine Database Plus, type GO MDP at any CompuServe prompt.

My fourth secret weapon is being a couch potato. When you get tired of staring at your computer monitor, go look at your TV screen. The Learning Channel has several truly excellent science series that they repeat *ad infinitum* (*PaleoWorld* and *The Practical Guide to the Universe* are tremendous; *Amazing Space* isn't quite as good).

My fifth secret weapon is Richard Morris. Never heard of him? Well, he

writes science-popularization books. He's not as famous as Carl Sagan or David Suzuki or Stephen Jay Gould, but he's better than all three of them combined. His slim, completely accessible books *Cosmic Questions: Galactic Halos, Cold Dark Matter, and the End of Time* (Wiley, New York, 1993) and *The Edges of Science: Crossing the Boundary from Physics to Metaphysics* (Prentice Hall, New York, 1990) will suggest enough story ideas to keep any hard-SF writer going for a decade or two.

Still, once you've read all the magazines and books, and watched Tom Selleck tell you about cosmic strings, nothing beats talking to a real scientist. Secret weapon number six is the knowledge that many scientists are SF fans. I've never had any scientist I approached refuse to help me. If you don't know any scientists personally,

call up the public-relations office of your local university, museum, or science centre and let them find someone who you can talk to.

And when you do have your story or novel finished, ask the scientist if he or she will read it over to check for errors. I'd never met Dr. Robert W. Bussard (inventor of the Bussard ramjet starship) or Dr. Dale A. Russell (curator of dinosaurs at the Canadian Museum of Nature) when I asked them to look at the manuscripts for my novels *Golden Fleece* (which features one of Bussard's ramjets) or *End of an Era* (which is about dinosaurs), but both instantly agreed and provided invaluable feedback. Of course, when your story or book does see print, do be sure to send a free autographed copy to anyone who helped you out. But that's not a secret weapon...it's just the golden rule. •

ROBERT J. SAWYER is the author of *Golden Fleece*, *Far-Seer*, *Fossil Hunter*, *Foreigner*, *End of an Era*, and *The Terminal Experiment*. His fiction has appeared in *Analog*, *Amazing Stories*, *ON SPEC*, and *Transversions*. He has a Bachelor of Applied Arts degree in Radio and Television Arts from Ryerson Polytechnic University, Toronto.

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- **Vol. 5, No. 3** (#14) Fall/93
Leslie Gadallah, Jason Kapalka, Dan Knight, Bruce Byfield, Alison Baird, Robert Boyczuk, Keith Scott, Preston Hapon, Rand Nicholson, David Nickle & Karl Schroeder. Cover: Robert Boerboom.
- **Vol. 5, No. 4** (#15) Winter/93
Derryl Murphy, Catherine MacLeod, T. Robert Szekely, Robert Boyczuk, Ivan Dorin, Luke O'Grady, M.A.C. Farrant, A.R. King, Wesley Herbert, Dave Duncan (excerpt from *The Stricken Field*). Cover: Robert Pasternak.
- **Vol. 6, No. 1** (#16) Spring/94
Theme: Hard SF. Karl Schroeder, Leah Silverman, Jean-Louis Trudel, Cory Doctorow, Phillip A. Hawke, Jason Kapalka, Wesley Herbert, Lydia Langstaff, Leslie Gadallah. Cover: James Beveridge.
- **Vol. 6, No. 2** (#17) Summer/94
Peter Watts, Harold Côté, Karin Lowachee, Bonnie Blake, Kate Riedel, Wesley Herbert, Hugh A.D. Spencer, Brian Burke, Jocko, Catherine Girczyc. Cover: Jean-Pierre Normand.
- **Vol. 6, No. 3** (#18) Fall/94
Charles de Lint, Mary E. Choo, Lesley Choyce, Marianne O. Nielsen, Bráulio Tavares, Rudy Kremberg, Michael Teasdale, Michael Stokes, Spider Robinson, Alice Major, Jocko, Barry Hammond, Art Feature: George Barr. Cover: Tim Hammell and Peter Renault.
- **Vol. 6, No. 4** (#19) Winter/94
W.P. Kinsella, Alex Link, Keith Scott, Alison Baird, Marcel G. Gagné, Christopher Brayshaw, Brian Panhuyzen, Roma Quapp, William Southey, Jocko. Art Feature: Robert Pasternak. Cover: Jean-Pierre Normand.
- **Vol. 7, No. 1** (#20) Spring/95
Theme: Horror & Dark Fantasy. Lyle Weis, Eileen Kernaghan, Peter Watts, Marie Jakober, Tanis MacDonald, Peter Darbyshire, David Nickle, L.R. Morrison. Art Feature: Peter Francis. *Nonfiction*: Barry Hammond, Robert J. Sawyer. Cover: Adrian Kleinbergen.
- **Vol. 7, No. 2** (#21) Summer/95
Heather Spears, Brent Hayward, Mary Soon Lee, Jason Kapalka, Erik Jon Spigel, Bruce Barber, Karen Keeley Wiebe, Jan Lars Jensen, Sandra Kasturi, Kirsten Oulton. Art Feature: W.B. Johnston. *Nonfiction*: Robert J. Sawyer. Cover: W.B. Johnston.

ON CONS:

Canadian Convention & Reading Calendar

When contacting conventions for more information, include a Self-Addressed Stamped Envelope for their reply. Abbreviation code: GoH = Guest of Honor, TM = Toastmaster.

• **SEPT 9 – FALCON**

Lord Nelson Hotel, Halifax. Memb: \$12 advance, \$15 at the door. Info: 1469 Brenton St, Box 160, Halifax NS, B3J 3W7.

• **SEPT 10 – QUADCON 6**

Talisman Hotel, Ottawa. Relaxacon. Info: PO Box 5752, Merivale Depot, Nepean ON, K2C 3M1.

• **SEPT 15 - 17 – CALGARY GAMING CON 8**

Marlborough Community Hall, Calgary. Info: 1835-10th Ave SW, Calgary AB, T3C 0K2.

• **SEPT 23 – SCIENCE-FICTION FESTIVAL II**

Days Inn, Montreal. GoH: Ed Bishop. Memb: \$12 at the door. Info: PO Box 311, Stn B, Montreal PQ, H3B 3J7

• **SEPT 29 - OCT 1 – WINCON**

Wargaming. GoH: Dave Arneson. Info: PO Box 28073, 1453 Henderson Highway, Winnipeg MB, R2G 4E9.

• **OCT 6 - 8 – BANFFCON '95**

Banff Park Lodge, Banff. GoHs: Terry Pratchett, Guy Gavriel Kay. Memb: \$40 to Sept 30/95, \$50 at the door. Info: PO Box 20001, Bow Valley Postal Outlet, Calgary AB, T2P 4H3.

• **OCT 27 - 29 – PRIMEDIA 2**

Ramada 400/401, Toronto. GoHs: Spider & Jeanne Robinson. Also attending: George Buza, Rob Wilson, Ed Sahely. Memb: \$25 to Sept 30/95, \$35 at the door. Info: 114-22 Tinder Cres, Toronto ON, M4A 1L6. Phone: (905) 820-3844.

• OCT 27 - 29 – CONCINNITY 95

Journey's End Hotel, Kanata. Relaxacon. GoHs: Capucine Plourde, Larry Stewart. Memb: \$20 at the door. Info: 26076-72 Robertson Rd, Nepean ON, K2H 5Y8.

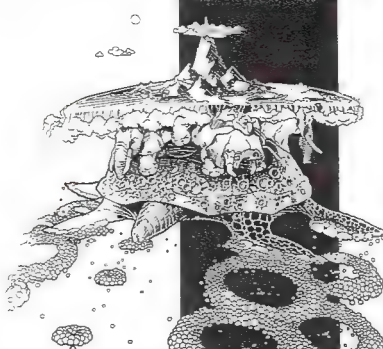
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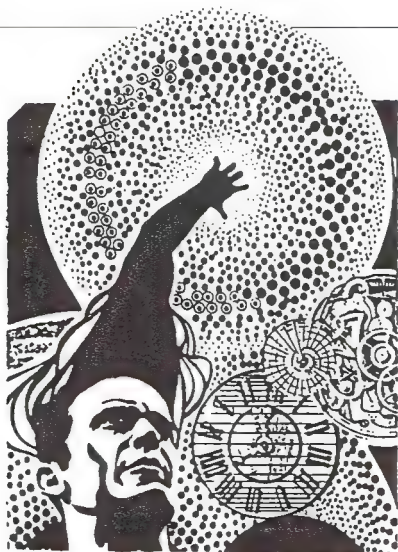
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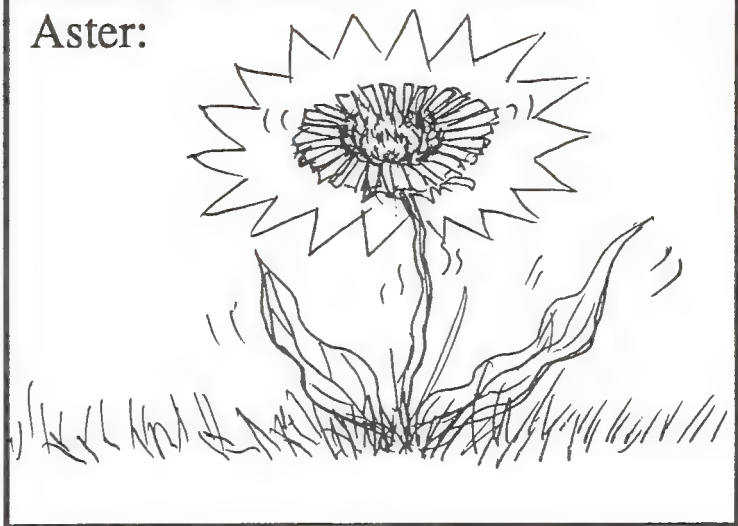
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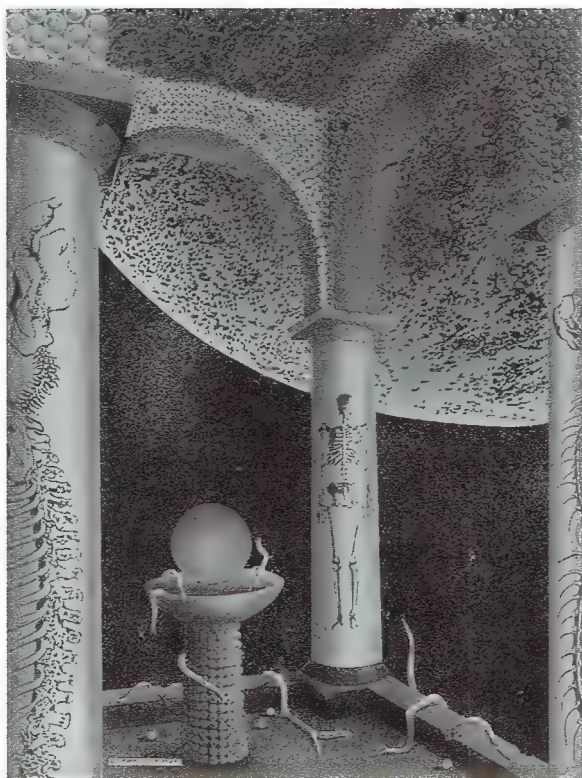
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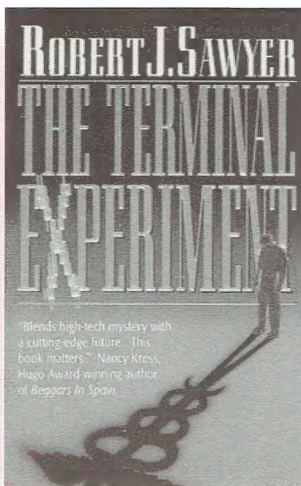
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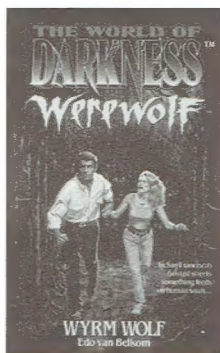
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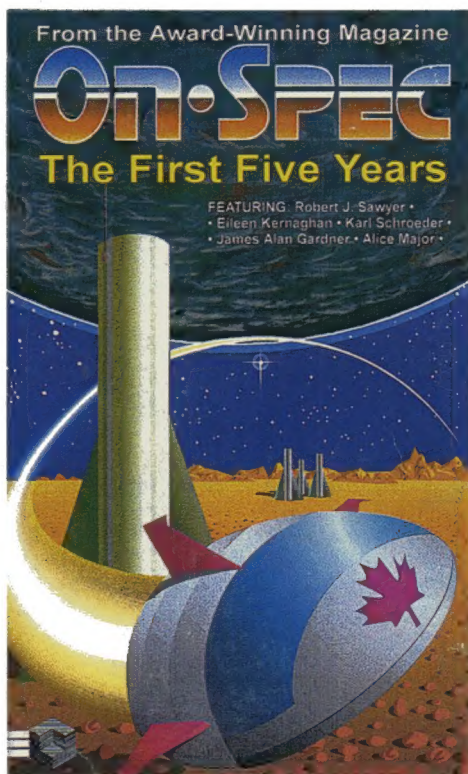
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